

Vladimir Beshanov

Year 1944 - "victorious"

-X

year 1944 -

"Year 1944 - "victorious" / Vladimir Beshanov": Yauza; Eksmo;  
M.; 2009 G5VM  
978-5-699-34324-9

annotation

1944 went down in the history of the Patriotic War as the year of "ten Stalinist strikes" and "decisive victories." It's always nice to remember victories. Therefore, they told, wrote, and filmed a lot about the 1944 campaign: about the genius of the Soviet commanders, about the heroism of the Red Army, which alone saved Europe, and the deceit of the allies, who put spokes in the wheels, about the peoples, who joyfully welcomed the liberators. This is the front side of the medal, which is on display for everyone to see and educate the younger generations. However, the coin also had another, flip side: even in the "victorious 44th" there were enough failed operations that are not customary to remember, and mediocre generals, and egregious mistakes, and senseless losses:

"The losses of the Red Army in 1944 amounted, according to incomplete data, to 6.5 million soldiers and officers killed and wounded, that is, as in previous years, the active army was "used up" by 100 percent. Surpassing the Third Reich in human resources by two and a half times, the USSR began the conscription of seventeen-year-old boys at the same time as Germany. The losses of the Wehrmacht on all fronts during the same period amounted to 1.6 million people ... "

A new book by a popular author is the bitter truth about the Great Patriotic War, a reminder of the terrible price of the victorious 1944 and the bloody underside of Stalin's triumphs.

Vladimir Beshanov  
Year 1944 - "victorious"

INTRODUCTION

"Ten Stalinist strikes are the largest strategic operations of the Soviet troops, carried out according to the plan and under the direct supervision of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the USSR I.V. Stalin during the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945.

Great Soviet Encyclopedia, v. 14

The term "ten crushing blows", denoting the totality of strategic operations carried out by the Soviet Armed Forces in 1944, was put into use already in 1945 at the suggestion of Stalin himself. Therefore, almost immediately they began to be called crushing Stalinist blows. Then the name of Stalin was crossed out, but the tradition was established.

Marshal A.M. Vasilevsky writes: "At one time, it was customary to call our main operations of 1944 on the Soviet-German front "ten blows" ... And although later these names fell out of use and only the older generation of Soviet citizens remembers them, I consider it possible to recall the old terminology".

The old terminology is gone, but the Stalinist chronology and interpretation are included in all historical textbooks, although in order of priority the second blow was dealt before the first and, logically, was not the second, but the third. It is worth digging deeper into our history, you will definitely run into the "Short Course" and "Stalin on the War".

In my previous work, "The Year of 1942 - "Training", I asked myself how and why the Germans ended up on the banks of the Volga in the second year of the war, and doubted the professional suitability of the Soviet generals, who had a double superiority in defense over the advancing enemy. Turns out I was wasting my time. On the pages of the Arguments and Facts newspaper, Georgy Kumanev, "Head of the Center for Military History of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Historical Sciences", with inimitable aplomb, relying on "documents and facts", explained the essence of the issue in one sentence: "The Headquarters of the Supreme High Command expected new offensive of the enemy not in the southern direction, but near Moscow.

Near Stalingrad, the Germans, it turns out, were "not expected." Everything ingenious is simple. And how much it explains.

In June 1941, our military-political leadership hoped that Hitler would strike through Ukraine, and he chose Belarus as the main direction. So they surrendered Minsk - they did not expect it. In September, it was expected that the 2nd Panzer Group would move towards Moscow, but it turned towards Kyiv. I had to surrender it out of surprise. Then they thought that Guderian would winter in Ukraine, but he, the "scoundrel", did hit Moscow, but not through Bryansk, where it was expected, but through Glukhov and Orel.

A year later, the Germans were expected near Moscow, and they took it and came to Stalingrad. They also did not expect to see the enemy in Maykop, Elista, Pyatigorsk, Kerch, Novorossiysk, Voroshilovgrad, Armavir. We did not expect to see German standards on top of Elbrus at all.

The depth of the historical analysis of the most dramatic period of the Patriotic War is amazing. The Center for Military History of Russia and its leader have much to be proud of. This is comparable only with Samson's version that Stalin deliberately lured the Germans to the Volga in order to "ruin" them the more likely. True, for this it was not necessary to penetrate into hidden vaults and look into top-secret folders with "documents and facts." It is enough just to take Zhukovsky's memoirs off the shelf.

If all this is a sign of the high professionalism of the "red marshals", then I will not argue. After all, "the Soviets have their own pride." Although the memoirs of the most famous Soviet commanders are naturally full of confessions of their own unsuitability: "we haven't been able to do this yet", "we haven't succeeded yet", "now I know what I should have done then". Vasilevsky and Rokossovsky, Eremenko and Zakharov, Kazakov and Grechko, Katukov and Rotmistrov, Gorbатов and Moskalenko, Bagramyan and Chuikov wrote about this. Isn't this an insufficient "cause" of our defeats?

Puzzled by the problem: "But how did the Red Army end up in Europe?", I immediately began checking myself against Kumanov. What would the "head of the Center" say about this? Probably, following the logic of reasoning, that the Germans did not expect the Red Army in Europe; they thought: Stalin would send troops to India or China, but he unexpectedly struck at Riga, Warsaw and Budapest.

Here I disagree. Firstly, it seems to me that the Germans still "waited" something like this from us; secondly, everything was somewhat more complicated and interesting.

So:

"The year 1944 - "victorious" - includes the winter campaign (1st, 2nd, 3rd Stalinist strikes) and the summer campaign (4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th Stalinist strikes). During the winter campaign, the German fascist troops were defeated near Leningrad, in the Right-Bank Ukraine, in the Crimea, and during the summer campaign - in the region of Karelia, in Belarus, Western Ukraine, in the Balkans, in the Baltic States, in Hungary and in Northern Finland "

## WINTER PLANS

Already at the beginning of the war with the Nazi invaders, Comrade Stalin foresaw that our forces in the course of this war, despite the temporary losses of a number of regions and cities, would grow and victory would be on our side.

From the report of A.S. Shcherbakova

By the end of 1943, the Red Army, having won the battles on the Kursk Bulge and the Dnieper, liberated more than two-thirds of the occupied territories and reached the approaches to Vitebsk, Orsha, Zhitomir, Kirovograd, Krivoy Rog, Perekop, Kerch, capturing on the right bank of the Dnieper, on the Kerch Peninsula and on the southern coast of the Sivash, bridgeheads of operational and strategic importance.

By the beginning of 1944, the strategic initiative was in the hands of the Soviet command and Stalin was not going to give it up to the enemy.

"The war has entered that stage," the Supreme Commander-in-Chief pointed out in a report dedicated to the 26th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, "when it comes to the complete expulsion of the invaders from Soviet soil and the liquidation of the fascist "new order in Europe."

The Red Army was ready for a new offensive campaign.

At the beginning of 1944, the Soviet Armed Forces, consisting of 70 combined arms, 5 tank, 17 air and 4 air defense armies, had 682 settlement divisions - 531 rifle, airborne and cavalry, 2 tank and mechanized divisions, 298 brigades. They were armed with 24,400 tanks and self-propelled guns, 244,400 guns and mortars (plus, as a rule, 92,800 50-mm mortars, which are usually not taken into account), 4,800 rocket launchers, 32,500 combat aircraft (46,400 vehicles in total).

Of these, 55 armies - 464 divisions and 169 brigades - were part of the active fronts and fleets.

In total, in January 1944, the enemy on the Soviet-German front was opposed by 6,268,000 personnel, 101,400 guns and mortars (without 50-mm mortars), 2,167 rocket artillery installations, 5,800 tanks and self-propelled guns, 13,400 combat aircraft.

In the reserve of the Stavka were three combined arms, two tank armies, directorates of two combined arms and an air army, six tank, mechanized, airborne and mixed aviation corps.

In 1943, the war economy of the USSR achieved new successes. The restored economy in the liberated areas also came into operation.

This made it possible to produce in 1944 4.86 million small arms (without revolvers and pistols), 47,300 guns and mortars (by the way, this is almost three times less than in 1943, due to a sharp decrease in the production of mortars, the number of which exceeded for 227,000 units), 29,000 tanks and self-propelled guns (including 14,648 IS vehicles and 14,648 T-34s), 33,200 combat aircraft, and 4 warships. Another 5,700 tanks, 3,400 aircraft and 575 ships were supplied under Lend-Lease by the Allies. In December 1943 alone, 1,639 tanks and self-propelled guns, 4,584 guns and mortars were sent to the active army.

At the same time, the combat qualities of weapons increased.

The tank and mechanized troops received a heavy IS tank armed with a 122-mm gun, and a modernized "thirty-four" with an 85-mm

cannon, self-propelled artillery mounts ISU-152, ISU-122 and SU-100, which made it possible to partially eliminate the backlog from the Panzerwaffe that arose in the summer of 1943.

The English military historian Alan Clark, noting the high level of unification that made it possible to issue armored vehicles in huge quantities, writes: "... the Russians continued to produce a huge amount of armored vehicles with a minimum of options. The T-34 chassis came from the factories in quantities of up to 2 thousand monthly, and they were divided equally between the usual types of T-34/85 and the SU self-propelled gun. The Soviet artillery and technical service created two new anti-tank guns - a long-barreled 100 mm and 122 mm, and now they began to install the "hundred" on self-propelled SU guns instead of the 85 mm gun. None of these novelties had advantages in muzzle velocity or projectile quality over the German variants of the 88mm or long-barreled 75mm, but due to the weight of the projectile, the same effect was achieved in a direct hit. Such heavy projectiles limited the supply of SU and severely hampered the crew, but the Russians' numerical superiority, their habit of enduring extreme inconvenience and enthusiasm for the sight of new weapons, more than compensated for this.

Artillery troops were armed with 160-mm mortars, and aviation formations received Yak-3, La-7 fighters, and Il-10 attack aircraft.

The organizational structure of the troops was also improved. The process of restoring the management of rifle corps has been completed. The combined arms army began to have, as a rule, three corps, numbering 8-9 rifle divisions in its composition. In total, 126 rifle corps were created in 1943.

The Soviet infantry division in 1944 was practically on par with the German one in terms of staffing: 11,706 people, 6,390 rifles and carbines, 4,115 machine guns and machine guns, 127 mortars, 112 guns.

The artillery troops formed 6 artillery corps, 26 artillery divisions, 7 guards mortar divisions, 20 separate artillery and 11 mortar brigades, 50 anti-tank artillery brigades and 140 regiments.

In the Air Force, mixed aviation corps were reorganized into homogeneous ones - fighter, assault and bomber.

Armored and mechanized troops developed rapidly. In January 1944, the sixth tank army was formed.

The formation of five tank armies as powerful front-line strike formations began in the spring of 1942, after they had recovered from the catastrophic losses of the initial period of the war and re-established the production of armored vehicles. The first experience was not entirely successful. The armies had a mixed composition: along with tank corps, they included 3-5 rifle divisions. As a result, the army did not have the necessary solidity and mobility in carrying out operational tasks. If it relied on rifle formations, then its actions did not differ in any way from the actions of a combined arms army; at the same time, she was not given the opportunity to use the mobility of the hulls, since they were constrained by the low maneuverability of rifle formations. Subsequently, these tank armies were disbanded. And in the first half of 1943, five guards tank armies of the new organization were created.

Each such army consisted of two tank and one mechanized corps, a separate tank and one or two self-propelled artillery brigades, as well as artillery units. According to the state, the tank army was supposed to have about 800 tanks and self-propelled guns and up to 750 guns and mortars. In fact, the composition and quantity of equipment in the army was a variable value: from 300 to 1000 tanks and self-propelled guns and from 500 to 850

guns and mortars.

The Soviet tank corps of the 1944 model was approximately equal in power to a German tank division: 10,977 soldiers and officers, 152 guns and mortars, 258 tanks and self-propelled guns.

The Soviet mechanized corps significantly outnumbered the enemy motorized division: 16,369 men, 252 guns and mortars, 246 tanks and self-propelled guns.

Similar German formations had an advantage only in the amount of anti-aircraft artillery and vehicles.

By the beginning of 1944, the Red Army had 5 tank armies, 24 tank and 13 mechanized corps, 80 separate tank brigades, 106 separate tank and 43 self-propelled artillery regiments.

But this is not the main thing. Many, sometimes even too many, personnel and a huge amount of equipment, the Red Army had at its disposal the entire war. But its command was by no means always able to properly dispose of these resources, which no Guderian even dreamed of. The low level of professional training and general outlook of commanders at all levels, the inability to lead troops in modern warfare, and the neglect of the individual training of an individual fighter led to a number of crushing defeats in the initial period of the war, which brought the Soviet Union to the brink of existence.

In a letter from Marshal G.K. Zhukov, not intended for memoirs, August 22

1944 to the head of the Main Directorate of Personnel, Colonel-General F.I. Golikov mentions some lessons:

“When developing a plan for the use and creation of personnel of the Red Army after the war, we must first of all proceed from the experience that we received in the initial period of the Patriotic War.

What will the experience teach?

First, we did not have pre-selected and well-trained commanders of fronts, armies, corps and divisions. At the head of the front stood people who failed one thing after another (Pavlov, Kuznetsov, Popov, Budyonny, Tyulenev, Ryabyshev, Timoshenko, etc.) ...

Even worse was the situation with the commanders of divisions, brigades and regiments. Divisions, brigades and regiments, especially the second-ranked ones, were assigned commanders who did not correspond to their work.

In short, each of us knows the consequences of the command of these people and what our Motherland experienced by entrusting its fate into the hands of such commanders and commanders.

Conclusions. If we do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past and want to wage war successfully in the future, we must, sparing no expense, train commanders of fronts, armies, corps and divisions in peacetime.

The money spent will be paid off by the successes of the war ...

Secondly, we certainly turned out to be unprepared with reserve personnel.

All commanders called up from the reserve, as a rule, did not know how to command regiments, battalions, companies and platoons. All these commanders learned war in war, paying for it with the blood of our people (all generals also learned war in war, and many of them directly write about this in their memoirs. - V.B.).

Thirdly, we did not have a cultured staff commander and, as a result, we did not have well-knit staffs.

Fourthly, culturally, our officer cadres did not adequately meet the requirements of modern warfare. Modern warfare is an 8/10 war of equipment with enemy equipment, which means that you need to be a cultured person in order to be able to quickly deal with your equipment and enemy equipment and,

having understood, competently apply your technique.

We must tell the truth that because of the illiteracy and lack of culture of our cadres, we suffered very heavy losses in equipment and manpower, without achieving the possible success.

Fifthly, the system of training and education of our personnel that exists in peacetime did not give us an exemplary and authoritative commander for the war.

In 1943, the Red Army changed qualitatively for the better in matters of organization, planning, and combat control.

Colonel-General of Tank Troops V.S. Arkhipov, who went through the war from the first day to the last, having personally experienced a lot, notes: “It is possible, after all, to create a huge number of divisions and corps, but they will not fight better from this. But

the reorganization in question reflected in its figures a very important fact: the Soviet tank forces had already fully recovered from the losses suffered in the forty-first year, and their command staff had gained a wealth of experience in managing large masses of tanks. The control mechanism has improved, and very dramatically, including communications and all types and methods of supplying tank troops, etc. All this made it possible to saturate the same formations with a large number of people and equipment ...

I also note the sharply increased skill in planning operations and command and control on the part of large tank headquarters. Inconsistency in actions, slowness in assessing the situation and making decisions, poor communication and other similar troubles that, for example, we sinned during a tank counterattack near Dubno in June 1941, by the beginning of 1944, practically did not repeat. I was pleased now with the high culture of staff work.

Qualitative changes are also noted by the enemy: "The Russians quickly learned to use new types of weapons and, oddly enough, showed themselves capable of conducting combat operations using complex military equipment ... The Russians were constantly improving, and their top commanders and headquarters received a lot of useful things by studying experience combat operations of their troops and the German army. They have learned to respond quickly to any changes in the situation, to act energetically and decisively.

The abolition of the institution of commissars also benefited the army. The morale of the troops was as high as ever: we drove the Fritz to the west.

Under these conditions, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief I.V. Stalin set tasks for the Armed Forces for 1944: "The point now is to clear our entire land of fascist invaders and restore the state borders of the Soviet Union along the entire line, from the Black Sea to the Barents Sea. But our tasks cannot be limited to the expulsion of enemy troops from our homeland ... In order to save our country and the countries allied with us from the danger of enslavement, it is necessary to follow the wounded German beast on the heels and finish him off in his own lair. While pursuing the enemy, we must rescue our brother Poles, Czechoslovaks and other peoples of Western Europe allied with us, who are under the heel of Nazi Germany, from German captivity.

Work on the plan of military operations for the winter period began in the autumn of 1943. As in previous years, no respite was foreseen. "In the course of the operations of the Soviet troops in the summer and autumn of this year," Stalin wrote to President Roosevelt, "it became clear that our troops could continue to continue offensive operations against the German army, and the summer campaign could develop into winter."

The final decision was made in early December 1943 at a joint meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, the State Defense Committee and the Headquarters.

In the established version: "The strategic plan of the Supreme High Command for the winter campaign of 1944 was to

successive blows to defeat the enemy: in the northwestern direction - the army group "North", in the southwestern direction - the army groups "South" and "A". On the central sector of the front, offensive operations were supposed to tie down the enemy forces. Thus, an offensive was envisaged from the Baltic to the Black Sea with the aim of defeating the enemy's flank strategic groupings in the Leningrad region, in the Right-Bank Ukraine and in the Crimea. The successful solution of these tasks created favorable conditions for the summer-autumn offensive of the Red Army in Belarus, the Baltic states and the southwest.

An essential feature of the strategic plan was that the offensive of the Red Army in the upcoming campaign was planned in stages, and not simultaneously along the entire length of the Soviet-German front. This made it possible to create powerful groupings of Soviet troops with a decisive superiority of forces and means over the enemy. Such groupings were supposed to achieve the defeat of the opposing enemy groupings in a short time, forming gaps in his defense in selected directions.

This is confirmed by Army General S.M. Shtemenko: "To dissipate the enemy's reserves, it was most expedient to alternate our operations in time and conduct them in areas that were significantly remote from each other. All this was foreseen in the campaign plans for the first half of 1944.

All this was invented after the war on the basis of the results achieved. In fact, everyone should have attacked simultaneously in all directions, but it did not work out everywhere.

At the Tehran Conference, Stalin agreed to the entry of the Soviet Union into the war with Japan, and the Allies firmly promised to land troops in northern France no later than May 1944. However, the issue of recognizing the Soviet territorial acquisitions of 1939-1940 was still up in the air. The British defended the interests of the Polish government in exile, the Americans "worried" about the Baltic republics.

Therefore, the strategic task of the Red Army was to reach the state border almost along its entire length by the end of spring and transfer military operations beyond the borders of the USSR.

The same Shtemenko writes on another page: "If we talk about the political goal of the upcoming operations, then it consisted primarily in the complete liberation of our country from the Nazi invaders."

The Stavka planned to strike the main blow with the forces of four fronts in the southwestern direction in order to defeat Army Groups "South" and "A" and reach the approaches to southern Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Balkans. A powerful blow in this direction made it possible to immediately and most effectively use the results of the autumn offensive to crush the enemy's strategic defense not only in the south, but on the entire Soviet-German front. The Germans, driven back from the Dnieper, did not have fortified lines and a stable front here. The largest grouping of the Red Army, which included the bulk of tank and mechanized formations, was also located here, which made it possible to prepare new operations quickly and without significant regroupings.

Success in the southwestern direction led to the liberation of areas with a highly developed metallurgical and mining industry, as well as fertile lands between the Dnieper and Prut. Accordingly, Germany was deprived of the largest sources of strategic raw materials. In addition, the withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Balkans inevitably led to pressure on the position of Hitler's allies - Hungary and Romania.

The military-political situation favored the solution of these tasks.

After more than four years of war, Nazi Germany was further from the goals set by the Führer than in the first two. The time for the successes of German weapons is over.

"In connection with the failure of the Citadel operation," admits General B. Müller Hillebrand, "on the Eastern Front, combat-ready and completely



motorized troops, but the strategic initiative was not wrested from the enemy ... during the retreat of the German troops, the enemy was left with a territory that reached a depth of more than 1000 km in the south, more than 300 km in the center and more than 200 km in the north. The withdrawal of the German troops was not the result of pre-planned defensive operations carried out of their own free will in order to preserve forces, but was the result of a series of defeats inflicted on the German troops by the enemy, who overturned the front of the German troops, which, according to the order, went into a tough defense. Losses in personnel and materiel of the troops were high. Morale has gone down."

The initiative irrevocably passed to the enemy.

The approaching 1944 did not promise victories for the pretenders to world domination. The situation on the fronts and theaters of armed struggle became increasingly unfavorable for the conquerors of "living space". The international position of the Reich also deteriorated sharply. Italy has already committed a "treason" - first capitulated, and then declared war on Germany. Far Eastern ally - Japan switched to a defensive strategy, having in front of it in the face of the United States and Great Britain opponents who possessed superior forces.

The German military-political leadership was forced to abandon the offensive strategy. Hitler, Keitel, Jodl and other commanders, while continuing to plan and direct the actions of the Wehrmacht, essentially no longer had any meaningful war plan. There was no respite; in the East and in Italy, the allies in the coalition waged an uninterrupted offensive. Many large German cities lay in ruins.

We had to reckon with the real possibility of a large-scale landing operation by the Anglo-American troops in Northern France and strengthen the grouping of troops in the West.

At the same time, Hitler and his entourage were counting more and more on the fact that with the further development of world events, the USA and England would clash with the Soviet Union and turn their weapons against it. General F. Mellenthin later wrote: "The split between the Soviet Union and the Anglo-Americans - that was our real hope." Hitler's strategic goal was to create conditions under which the coalition would lose confidence in achieving unity among the individual participants.

Nazi bosses and top generals increasingly thought about the possibility of a separate peace with the United States and England, subject to the elimination of the Fuhrer. Peace with Hitler no one wanted.

The general setting for a new campaign can be reduced to one phrase: buy time in the hope of the best. The military was not enthusiastic about such a strategy.

The German military leadership "... limited itself only to reacting as quickly and as expediently as possible to all enemy actions in order to gain time, and also tried to maintain the combat capability of its armed forces at the proper level. However, the gain in time was not used to achieve political goals. With the help of sophisticated propaganda about a non-existent "wonderful weapon", various calls to "resist and endure" from the German people, the senselessness of the further continuation of the war was hidden and hopes were inspired for a turn for the better, despite all the defeats. Where propaganda did not reach its goal, cruelty took over.

compulsion".

However, the course of the world war was far from over. At the disposal of the top of the Reich, there were enough forces and means to continue the struggle. Recognizing that the striking power of the Wehrmacht in the summer battles of 1943 on the Eastern Front had been severely undermined, Hitler, in his order of November 27 of the same year, stated: "I intend to restore the fighting strength of the troops fighting on the front using the most ruthless methods and break through draconian punishments any resistance to given orders. Regardless of the fact that all possibilities for drawing on reserves from the civilian sector are already running out, the branches of the armed forces and the SS troops must now, first of all, from their own ranks, select and send the necessary forces to the front. I demand that measures be taken immediately in the branches of the armed forces and in the SS troops, so that at least one million men are singled out and sent to the front ... "

On the basis of this order, the staffing of headquarters and rear units was reduced by 25 percent, a number of positions in military institutions were recruited by women, one third of the training units were disbanded, and the requirements for determining the degree of suitability for service in active units were "simplified".

Measures to find new sources of manpower made it possible during the first five months of 1944 to reform 24 divisions of the ground forces, 3 divisions of the air force and 13 divisions of the SS troops.

Totalitarian regimes develop according to uniform laws: on December 22, 1943, Hitler ordered the introduction of "National Socialist leadership in the Wehrmacht." A headquarters for the National Socialist leadership was created in the Design Bureau, the head of which reported directly to the Fuhrer. This body was supposed to establish a "close relationship with the National Socialist Party as an expression of political will." Exactly the same headquarters were created in all branches of the armed forces up to the headquarters of the division, and below the battalion inclusive - freelance officers for the National Socialist leadership. The "models" and "Mansteins" had their own "political instructors", because, according to the Fuhrer: "Wars of this magnitude are not resolved due to numerical and material superiority ... The task of the National Socialist leadership officer is to activate the political education of soldiers devoted to the national -socialism.

By the beginning of 1944, the Wehrmacht had 19 army formations, which included 264 infantry, 50 tank and motorized divisions and 8 brigades - a total of 318 settlement divisions. There were 9.4 million people in the armed forces, of which more than 7 million were in the ground forces and the SS troops. The strength of the active army was 4,268,640 people, 9133 tanks and assault guns (including 477 commanding ones that did not have cannon weapons, and 1546 obsolete light vehicles discontinued from production, used for security services in the rear and for training purposes), of which on the East front, West and in the Mediterranean - 117 settlement divisions, | 100,000 people. On the Eastern Front, 12 armies included 201 settlement divisions, including 22 tank and 9 motorized divisions - 2528 thousand people. In addition, 15 Finnish, 9 Hungarian, 12 Romanian and 2 Slovak divisions acted against the Red Army.

Together, this amounted to 3,480 thousand people, 54,570 guns and mortars (excluding 50-mm mortars and rocket launchers), 5,400 tanks and assault guns, 3,073 combat aircraft.

The reserve of the Supreme High Command of the German Armed Forces had 8.5 divisions, which were stationed in the eastern regions of the Reich, in Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

The German tank division in 1944 had a staff of 14,727 people, 275 guns and mortars, 125 tanks and assault guns.

The motorized division had 15421 people, 232 guns and mortars, 45 tanks.

According to the new staff, the infantry division had: 10,708 people, 9420 carbines, 2311 machine guns and machine guns, 86 mortars, 104 guns. In addition, 2005 full-time positions were provided for "auxiliary service volunteers" - Slavs in the service of the Wehrmacht. They were involved mainly in carts, supply units and repair units, and, according to the Germans, they served "honestly". A shamefully hushed up fact for a long time: by the middle of 1944, half a million Soviet citizens served in the German ground forces alone.

The German war economy, despite the Anglo-American strategic bombing, worked smoothly. The output of military products in 1944 continued to expand, the production of weapons reached the highest level in the entire war and covered the losses.

In 1944, the military industry produced 2.5 million rifles and carbines, 78,900 guns and mortars, 17,489 tanks and assault guns, 32,900 combat aircraft, 230 submarines, 310.3 million shells and mines. The production of tanks and assault guns increased significantly, exceeding 1,000 vehicles per month at the end of 1943. By the end of 1944, it reached its peak and amounted to almost 1,800 tanks, assault guns and tank destroyers per month. The proportion of the latest types of tanks has increased. It was possible to establish, according to German concepts, "mass production" - over 300 vehicles per month - of excellent U-type tanks. In many respects, the "panther" surpassed the famous "thirty-four", but in response to the 3125 "panthers" produced by the German industry, the Soviet side issued 14 648 T-34 tanks, and 1000 "tigers" accounted for 2250 "Joseph Stalins".

In connection with the introduction of new effective anti-tank weapons "Panzerfaust" and "Ofenror" - the prototypes of today's grenade launchers - the ability to fight tanks in close combat has increased.

Great hopes were pinned on the "wonder weapon" forged in some secret laboratories.

However, all this was no longer enough to conduct offensive operations. The situation on the Eastern Front left no hope for the resumption of large-scale active operations.

At the beginning of 1944, the chief of the German General Staff, in a report at a meeting of senior officers, said: "Every offensive that does not lead to complete success ends with a defense. In this regard, Germany, after the failure of the attempt to defeat Russia by force of arms, was forced to go on the defensive in the east. Forced to admit irrefutable facts, the speaker continued: "Our immediate task is to continue to defend in the east with the forces available there, to repel a large offensive in the west, which, of course, is to come. In this regard, there is an intention to seize the initiative in order to be able to transfer to the west and to the Mediterranean region the troops necessary for offensive combat operations capable of deciding the outcome of the war. Until that moment, we should continue to wear down the enemy on the fronts in the east and in Italy, waging separate offensives as part of the strategic defense, and stubbornly hold our lines.

For the first time after the unleashing of aggression, the Hitlerite Headquarters thought about

positional struggle. To this end, the German military leadership sought to "weaken the forces of the Russians and hold the lines located as far as possible to

east of the borders of Germany and the most important sources of raw materials that still remained in the hands of the Germans. In many ways, the Germans relied on defense in depth, but on the southern wing of the Eastern Front they had not yet had time to create it. General Müller-Hillebrand reports: "The forces were no longer enough. Maneuverability, as the main element of combat operations, could no longer be ensured. Compensation for the expected losses could be carried out only to a limited extent ... In the East, Hitler no longer had any offensive plans.

The German command assumed that the main efforts of the Red Army would be aimed at the southern half of the Eastern Front for an offensive towards the Balkans and southern Poland. Predicting the intentions of the Stalinist Headquarters quite accurately, it believed that Soviet troops would deliver the main blow to the northern flank of Army Group South from the Kiev region in order to reach the Dniester and the Romanian border and at the same time continue the offensive from the Dnepropetrovsk region, on the lower reaches of the Dnieper and in Crimea, as well as against the Army Group "Center" in the Bobruisk direction. The German command expected another major offensive operation against the adjacent flanks of Army Groups North and Center with strikes from the Nevel and east of Vitebsk areas in the directions of Dautavpils, Riga, Minsk and Vilnius.

The Germans saw the only way to prevent a catastrophe in converting military operations into positional forms. It was envisaged by conducting a strategic defense, combining stubborn defense of the occupied lines with counterattacks in separate sectors, to hold the entire occupied territory, bleed the Red Army and force it to stop offensive operations. Hitler categorically rejected all the proposals of the front commanders to reduce the front line and withdraw troops to more advantageous lines.

Providing for the stubborn retention of the positions occupied, the Wehrmacht High Command did not abandon its intentions to restore the defense along the Dnieper. At the end of 1943, it was preparing a strike on Kyiv in order to throw Soviet troops off the right bank of the river, and also planned to strike from the Nikopol bridgehead in a southerly direction to restore contact with the group cut off in the Crimea.

Thus, the main line of strategic behavior of the German command in the East was a stubborn struggle in order to hold the occupied lines and the implementation of private offensive operations within the framework of this defense to improve the operational position of the troops in anticipation of a transition to active operations.

Defense plans on the Soviet-German front were also conditioned by a number of considerations of a political and economic nature. By holding the lines they occupied, the German leadership hoped to inspire the German people and their allies with the idea that the front was in the depths of the Soviet Union, thereby supporting the illusions of "lasting gains" in the East.

Particular importance was attached to the retention of the Right-Bank Ukraine and the Crimea with their rich food resources, the manganese of Nikopol, the ore of Krivoy Rog and Kerch, as well as the Black Sea basin with first-class seaports. The German command took into account the important strategic position of the Right-Bank Ukraine and the Crimea, as areas covering the approaches to southern Poland, the Balkans and providing control over the central and western parts of the Black Sea.

The German General Staff also had other calculations. The Germans saw that the losses of the Red Army were unimaginably great. As Manstein recalls: "... one could assume that the human resources of the Soviet Union would gradually run out.

The reserves of the older ages, from which he drew strength for his new formations, seemed to have been largely used up already. If only a new draft age remained as a replenishment for the front, then the enemy could no longer create new formations on a large scale ... "

It is true that if in 1941 571 settlement divisions were re-formed in the Red Army, in 1942 - 333, in 1943 - 125, then in 1944 - only 25 settlement divisions. During the same period, the Germans defeated and destroyed 337 Soviet divisions, irretrievable Soviet losses amounted to about 8 million troops.

In the four and a half years of the war since 1939, the Wehrmacht lost 140 divisions destroyed and disbanded and about 2.3 million people killed and missing, and this was considered "great losses."

"In these heavy battles," Field Marshal Manstein, commander of Army Group South, admitted, "an increasingly severe drop in the combat effectiveness of our formations was inevitable ... OKH did not have the replenishment necessary for us in equipment and people to compensate for the losses."

The German armed forces needed a breather to restore their human and material reserves, especially on the southern wing of the front, where they suffered the most tangible blows.

Hitler still believed in victory. As Alan Clark writes, "he deceived himself by counting the divisions 'by number' and, ignoring the new quality of the Red Army, made comparisons with 1941...".

The generals considered the leadership of the Fuhrer catastrophically incompetent; Hitler, in turn, did not trust the army enough to give it independence.

A new year, 1944, was coming - "the year of decisive victories."

## FIRST STALIN IMPACT

"... inflicted troops of the Leningrad, Volkhov and 2nd Baltic fronts with the support of the artillery of the ships of the Baltic Fleet and the artillery of Kronstadt near Leningrad and Novgorod"

The purpose of the operation, according to all sources, was "to defeat the Nazi German Army Group North, completely lift the blockade and clear the Leningrad Region of Nazi invaders," and also create favorable conditions for the "liberation of the Soviet Baltic states."

This is not entirely true.

Our military-historical science in describing offensive operations

The Red Army has always presented what has been achieved as desired. For example, if the troops of two fronts stormed the village of Gadyukino for a month, then you can be sure that it is written in the annals that the purpose of the operation was precisely the capture of an important strategic point of Gadyukino and the liberation of the territory of the Zavety Ilyich collective farm from the invaders. If it was not possible to free Gadyukino, then the goal was to "hinder the enemy's forces" and prevent him from transferring reserves to other directions. And indeed, the enemy did not transfer reserves, as a rule - and did not intend to. This means that the goal of the operation has been achieved, and Gadyukino did not interest us at all.

Preparations for the first strike began in September 1943. And on October 20, the Kalinin Front was renamed the 1st Baltic; based on the field

management of the Bryansk Front, the 2nd Baltic was formed. What would that mean? General G.G. Semyonov recalls this:

"The renaming of the fronts was of great moral and political importance. We now looked forward to where the Baltic Sea lay, and mentally estimated the way ahead.

This was precisely the ultimate goal of the planned strategic operation of not three, but four fronts (Stalin also "mentally estimated"), and the lifting of the blockade was an important, but only its first stage.

"SINYAVINSKY polygon"

The blockade of Leningrad began on September 8, 1941, when the Germans broke through the Mga station, captured Shlisselburg and reached the shore of Lake Ladoga, cutting off the city from land.

For almost a year and a half, Leningrad was separated from the rest of the country by a corridor only 15 km wide, which in military reports was called the Shlisselburg-Sinyavino ledge. Attempts to break the blockade began to be made almost immediately. But both the two offensives through Sinyavino, and the more ambitious Lyuban operation, launched with the aim of defeating the entire Army Group North, failed mainly due to the mediocrity of the generals, the untrained troops and the criminally negligent organization.

The main role in all attempts to provide effective assistance to Leningrad was played by the 2nd shock army. By definition, a shock army is an army intended to defeat enemy groupings in the most important directions. And its first commander was the "great commander", Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, Lieutenant General GG. Sokolov, who imagines himself to be Alexander Suvorov of modern times. He immediately actively engaged in the preparation of troops, issuing reprint orders from the Science of Victory:

"1. Walking, like the crawling of flies in autumn, I cancel and order henceforth to walk in the army like this: a military step is a arshin, and they should walk. Accelerated - one and a half, and press.

2. Food is out of order. In the midst of the battle, they dine and the march is interrupted for breakfast. In war, the order is this: breakfast is dark, before dawn, and dinner is dark, in the evening. During the day you will be able to eat bread or chew crackers with tea - good, but not - and thanks for that, since the day is not particularly long.

3. Remember to everyone - both the chiefs, and the privates, and the old and the young, that during the day it is impossible to walk more than a company in columns, but in general in a war for a campaign it is night, then march.

4. Do not be afraid of the cold, do not dress up as Ryazan women, be well done and do not succumb to frost. Rub your ears and hands with snow!..."

True, a month later, before the Luban operation, the cretin was removed from his post. The army was headed by General N.K. Klykov. And he took her to Myasnoy Bor. Then, saying he was sick, he flew off to improve his health. Nikolai Konyaev in his book cites the memoirs of Lieutenant I. Nikonov about these battles:

"During the days of the onset of food, they did not receive any. The kitchen was not suitable for kilometers ... Cartridges were given one or two clips each, they had to be taken from the wounded and the dead ... Three youth battalions, of an average age of about twenty in white coats, were especially remembered. As soon as they arrived, they immediately went on the offensive, and after an hour and a half, almost no one was left of them. Replenishments came, and we all led the offensive, and the Germans mowed us down like grass. In front of the German positions, everything was beaten with shells, strewn with corpses, and there were even heaps of corpses, as the wounded stretched, piled on the corpses and also died or froze. We have cells or trenches

there were none. They lay down in the craters and behind the corpses, they served as protection from the enemy ... Nobody removed the corpses from the front line and did not consider who was killed here, because if you do this in front of the eyes of the enemy, you will still lose a lot of people, so they decayed here missing...

The German occupied a fortified position along the railroad embankment. He had all kinds of weapons, and he had enough ammunition. And in the morning we went on the offensive with an incomplete regiment, with bullet weapons and a lack of ammunition. Therefore, they did not achieve success and suffered heavy losses. The command moved back from the front line of defense and organized a command post there. We were left at the forefront, like infantry ... "

At the same time, the head of the Special Department of the Volkhov Front, Major Melnikov, reported on the combat everyday life of the fathers-commanders:

"...) in February, during the offensive of the division, the chief of staff and the commissar of the division left for the command post. Dorofeev, on the other hand, (commander of the 378th rifle division. - V.B.) summoned a military paramedic girl to his dugout and drank with her for four days. He motivated his failure to leave the command post due to illness.

The command staff in conversations among themselves says: "... Well, how is our drunken bosses, what did they decide? ..." At the time of the combat mission, parts of the division to seize the village of Ostrov Dorofeev, Kornyshev and chief of staff Axelrod drank for three days without leaving the dugouts ...

... The command of the 59th Army, knowing that the 377th, 372nd, 374th and 378th rifle divisions are not conducting active operations and are actually occupying the defense, in the operational reports of the headquarters, the actions of these divisions are noted as "actively pinning down the enemy" and "conducting combat intelligence. The inactivity of these divisions in the operational reports is also called "repelling enemy counterattacks", not ashamed to report that the divisions are repulsing the counterattack of one enemy platoon ... "

As a result, the commander of the Volkhov Front, General Meretskov, who led the operation at a distance of hundreds of kilometers from Malaya Vishera, surrounded by his wife, son and attached relatives, drove the 2nd shock army into a German bag. Soviet losses in the Luban operation amounted to an incomplete account of 308,367 people killed, captured and wounded - 95% of the troops brought into battle. Another 95,000 were lost while trying to rescue the dying army.

Marshal Meretskov believes that this is normal and even reproaches himself for the fact that

spiritual subtlety did not lay down enough of his soldiers: "To save millions, we throw tens of thousands of people into battle, knowing that many thousands will die. Such is military logic. I have always been very worried about any loss. I am compelled to say this, even if someone will regard it as my inherent weakness.

Losses only during the three operations to de-blockade Leningrad under the leadership of Zhukov, Khozin, Govorov, Voroshilov and the complex Meretskov amounted to about 600,000 fighters and commanders, more than a third of them were killed, "decayed missing" or were captured - all due to for the inherent weakness of our commanders "to survive any losses." With zero military result.

All this time in Leningrad, 3,000-4,000 people died from starvation and shelling every day.

In November 1942, the development of the third Sinyavino operation began. Its idea was simple as an orange: with counter strikes from the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts along the shortest route, liquidate the Ladoga bridgehead of the enemy and "ensure the communications of the Leningrad Front."

Three armies of the Volkhov and Leningrad fronts were allocated to participate in the operation. They included 21 rifle divisions, 14 rifle and 7 tank brigades - 302,800 people. The main blows were delivered by the 67th and 2nd shock armies, supported by 4,000 guns and mortars, 520 tanks and 900 aircraft of the 13th and 14th

air armies and the Baltic Fleet. Long-range aviation, coastal and naval artillery were also involved.

The coordination of the actions of the two armies, which received the code name Operation Iskra, was carried out by representatives of the Headquarters Marshal K.E. Voroshilov and Army General G.K. Zhukov.

These forces were opposed by 4 infantry divisions of the 26th Army Corps of the 18th Army of General Lindemann, about 700 guns and mortars, up to 500 assault guns. Up to four divisions the army command could transfer from the operational reserve. Over the past time, the enemy did not waste time and turned the ledge into a powerful field fortified area with an extensive system of engineering structures.

On the morning of January 12, 1943, the strike groups of the fronts went on the offensive and, having overcome 6-8 km in six days of continuous fighting, united in the area of Poselok No. , having lost about 120,000 people killed and wounded - almost half of the original composition - went on the defensive on the outskirts of the Sinyavinsky Heights.

As a result, a land corridor 8 to 11 km wide was broken between the Volkhov and Leningrad fronts along the shores of Lake Ladoga. It was not possible to clear the Kirov highway from the enemy.

The main reasons for the failure to fulfill the assigned task remained the same: "The commanders of units and formations did not care that, before the start of the offensive, the nature of the enemy's defense, its strong and. weaknesses, groupings, combat composition and combat effectiveness of the enemy were revealed (sixteen months were not enough to reconnoiter patch 13 by 15 km! ... As a result, the commanders of subunits and units deprived themselves of the opportunity to make a decision appropriate to the situation. Deficiencies in intelligence led to the fact that that the troops constantly ran into all kinds of surprises ... the withdrawal of troops to the area of the starting position was carried out disorganized, the camouflage was broken. These shortcomings led to the fact that the troops were still in the starting position



suffered significant losses and lost the necessary impact force before the start of the attack ... Some commanders at the beginning of the battle let go of the control of the battle, stopped monitoring the situation and its changes and did not give the troops any orders (for example, the divisional commander who was sick in bed with the military assistant Dorofeev) ... This led to the fact that the troops acted independently, the control of the battle was violated, which, of course, apart from losses and failures, could not give anything significant. Interaction issues were worked out only for the initial period of the battle, while hastily, superficially. As a result, during the battle, the interaction between the branches of the troops was often disrupted ... The commanders and headquarters did not have good skills in commanding troops in the offensive and organizing an offensive battle.

By order of the State Defense Committee, a temporary 35-kilometer railway line from Polyany to Shlisselburg, called the Road of Victory, and a low-water bridge across the Neva were built through peat bogs in 18 days. Already on February 8, at the Finland Station, Leningraders met the first train with food from the mainland. However, the narrow corridor was shot through by German artillery and did not provide a regular supply of the fortress city: "The trains had to be driven under bombing and artillery fire. Fragments overtook and machinists, and stokers, and conductors. The repair of tracks was often done with improvised means on a live thread ... With the onset of summer, the trains, contrary to all existing rules and ideas, moved along the hub in the water. And yet the road worked ... "The main cargo flows

By

still walked along the Road of Life across Lake Ladoga. In addition, there was a threat that the Germans would be able to restore the situation.

But the breakthrough of the Leningrad blockade was of great symbolic significance. The battle for Settlement No. 5 fell into the category of strategic operations of the Red Army. It is strange, but Meretskov, who commanded the Volkhov Front, and his deputy Fedyuninsky, and the head of the engineering service Khrenov, and other memoirists, describing the preparation and course of the operation, recalled meetings and consultations with Govorov and Voroshilov, but did not say a word about Zhukov, who coordinated their actions. . Yes, and Zhukov himself did not remember anything about this, although it was for the Iskra operation on January 18 that he was awarded the title of Marshal of the Soviet Union.

In the summer of 1943, the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts tried to expand the corridor, inflicting two strong blows in converging directions on Mga, but did not advance a single step. Since it was not possible to take the station, it was stated that they did not strive for this. Having reached complete insanity, the team of authors, edited by Marshal N.V. Ogarkova claims that "the main thing was not the capture of territory, but the infliction of maximum losses on the enemy (!)". Only Soviet military science can guess that within a month it is necessary to throw infantry into a defense in depth, well-organized, saturated with firing points in order to kill several hundred Germans. The troops of the two Soviet armies from July 22 to August 22, without capturing the "territories", lost 80 thousand people killed and wounded. But "the main goal of the operation was achieved (!) ... the enemy suffered heavy losses in living strength and technology, especially from artillery fire and air strikes (?)." Why did the infantry need to be killed in massed, maddening attacks by German machine gunners?

But they really made an indelible impression on the enemy: "The attack twice made will be repeated for the third and fourth time, regardless of the losses incurred, and the third and fourth attacks will be carried out with the same stubbornness and composure ... The area in front of the defenders in the blink of an eye was suddenly filled Russians. They appeared as if from under the ground, and it seemed impossible to contain the impending avalanche. Huge gaps from our fire were immediately filled; waves of infantry rolled in one after another, and only when the manpower reserves dried up could they roll back ... Repulsing this kind of attack depends not

as much on the availability of technology as on whether the nerves can withstand it. Only battle-hardened soldiers were able to overcome the fear that gripped everyone.

## LENINGRAD-NOVGOROD OPERATION

At the beginning of 1944, the Leningrad Front, consisting of the 23rd, 2nd shock, 42nd, 67th combined arms and 13th air armies, under the command of Army General L.A. Govorov, took up defense with a length of 256 km. 23rd Army Lieutenant General A.I. Cherepanov was located on the Karelian Isthmus. The 2nd shock occupied positions in the Oranienbaum area on a bridgehead with a length of up to 50 km along the front and 25 km in depth. The 42nd and 67th armies - in the zone north of Uritsk, Gontovaya Lipka, protecting the southern and southeastern approaches to Leningrad. The Baltic Fleet and the Leningrad Air Defense Army were operationally subordinate to the front.

Volkhov Front - 8th, 54th, 59th combined arms, 14th air armies - under the command of Army General K.A. Meretskova defended a 232-kilometer strip from Gontovaya Lipka to Lake Ilmen, holding on the western bank of the Volkhov, 30 km north of Novgorod, a bridgehead 35 km wide and 10 km deep.

2nd Baltic Front of Army General M.M. Popova - 1st shock, 22nd, 6th guards, 3rd shock, 10th guards combined arms and 15th air armies - operated in a 320-kilometer strip between lakes Ilmen and Neshchedro.

The troops of three fronts, deeply covering the flanks of Army Group North,

occupied an advantageous position relative to the enemy.

Back in the autumn of 1943, in the northwestern direction, as a result of an increase

the number and more coordinated actions of the fighter aviation of the fronts, the Leningrad Air Defense Army and the air defense systems of the Baltic Fleet, the air situation improved. Soviet aviation won air supremacy, which led to a sharp decrease in the intensity of enemy raids on troops and directly on Leningrad. On the night of October 17, the last bomb fell on the city. The position of the besieged improved. Breaking the blockade, laying a fuel pipeline and a power cable along the bottom of Lake Ladoga, restoring land communications with the country had a beneficial effect on the life and combat activities of the defenders. The growth in food supplies and the reduction in the population to 800,000 people made it possible to increase the grain ration to 400-600 grams.

The production of large-caliber naval artillery resumed in the city. Mass production of artillery shells and mines for all types of mortars began in the third quarter. The construction of small ships and boats began, primarily the minesweepers that were sorely needed by the fleet. Nevertheless, Leningrad remained a front-line city.

The interests of ensuring the security of Leningrad, as well as political and strategic considerations related to the further conduct of the war, demanded the complete lifting of the blockade and the liberation of the Leningrad region. This was the primary task of the troops of the northwestern direction. Its implementation opened the way to the Baltic, facilitated the liberation of Karelia, the fleet's entry into the expanses of the Baltic.

By that time, the position of Army Group North, commanded by Field Marshal Georg von Küchler, had deteriorated significantly. Germanic

the command could not strengthen it either at the expense of strategic reserves or by transferring forces from other army groups, since they were pinned down by the powerful offensive of Soviet troops in the southwestern and western directions. Throughout 1943, for Hitler, Army Group North did not seem to exist. From July 1943 to January 1944, Küchler had to transfer the most combat-ready motorized and two infantry divisions to the Center group and five infantry divisions to the South Army Group, two of them just a week before the Soviet troops went on the offensive near Leningrad. In order to somehow compensate for the withdrawal of troops from the northwestern direction, three infantry divisions were transferred there, which had a large shortage in personnel and military equipment from the Army Group Center, motorized and infantry divisions, an infantry brigade of SS troops from Germany, a motorized brigade from Yugoslavia.

The High Command set the troops of the North group the task of firmly defending their positions and continuing the blockade of Leningrad. Stabilization of this section of the Eastern Front made it possible to reliably cover the approaches to the Baltic states and its naval bases, preserve the freedom of action of the German fleet in the Baltic Sea and ensure sea communications with Sweden and Finland.

For more than two years, the Germans were building defensive structures near Leningrad and Novgorod. By the beginning of 1944, along an arc, resting with its flanks on the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ilmen, a powerful, well-equipped defense in engineering terms was created. It was based on strong nodes of resistance and strongholds, which had all-round defense, saturated with artillery and machine-gun reinforced concrete, armored and wood-and-earth firing points. They were equipped in all settlements, at important junctions of railways and highways, at dominant heights and had a developed system of main and cut-off

positions covered by multi-layered fire. Mine-explosive and wire obstacles, anti-tank ditches, gouges, scarps were widely used. In swampy areas, bulk ramparts were arranged, and in the forests - blockages mined with powerful land mines.

Before the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts, two defensive lines were prepared in the tactical zone and a number of intermediate lines in the operational depth. Beginning in the autumn of 1943, German troops were intensively preparing for the defense of the Oredezh, Luga, Plyussa, Shelon, Narva and Velikaya rivers. Large settlements: Strelna, Krasnoe Selo, Pushkin, Krasnogvardeysk, Tosno, Lyuban, Chudovo, Luga, Kingisepp and others were also prepared for defensive battles. The wooded and swampy terrain, hilly in the west, facilitated the organization of defense, camouflage of troops, and their secret concentration in threatened areas. In most sectors in front of the Leningrad Front, the enemy's front line passed along the ridges of the heights, and in front of the center and left wing of the Volkhov Front - along the western bank of the Volkhov and was covered on the right by Lake Ilmen.

A developed network of railways and highway communications ensured uninterrupted supply of troops and quick maneuvering of reserves both from the depths and along the front.

Between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Peipus along the Narva River, along the western shore of Lake Peipus and further on the Pskov, Ostrov, Idritsa section and to the south along the Velikaya River, the rear defensive line "Panther" was erected. The total depth of defense reached 230-260 km, but the main forces and assets were located in the tactical zone. The most powerful fortifications were created south of the Pulkovo Heights, in front of the 42nd Army of the Leningrad Front, and north of Novgorod, in front of the 59th Army of the Volkhov Front.

On the southern flank, in the zone of the 2nd Baltic Front, there was no solid front. Forests and numerous swamps made it possible to defend themselves with small forces. Therefore, the German defense here consisted of separate strongholds and nodes of resistance.

Accordingly, the troops of Army Group North were unevenly distributed.

The 18th army of General Georg Lindemann, defending north of Lake Ilmen, consisted of 19 divisions and 3 brigades. All formations, with the exception of one infantry division. - the reserve of the army commander, located in the main line of defense. The division had an average of 20 km of front. The army had two special-purpose artillery groups that systematically shelled Leningrad and Kronstadt.

Lindemann's armies were opposed by six combined arms armies of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts - 52 rifle divisions, 9 rifle, 8 tank brigades, 5 fortified areas, and parts of the marines.

Operating from Lake Ilmen to Pskov in front of the troops of the 2nd Baltic Front, the 16th German Army had 21 divisions and 1 brigade. There was one division in the reserve of the army commander. The operational density was 23 km per division. General Popov had 41 divisions and 9 brigades deployed in the same space.

In the reserve of the commander of Army Group North were three security and one field training divisions located in Pskov, Ostrov, Vyru and Tartu.

Considering the favorable situation, the Military Council of the Leningrad Front on September 9, 1943, immediately after the end of the Sinyavinskaya

operations, sent to the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command considerations on the further conduct of hostilities. In particular, it was planned to defeat the 18th Army, as the basis of the northern wing of the Eastern Front, and "not only to finally liberate Leningrad, but also to seize the entire Luga bridgehead with access to the border of the river. Meadows from the mouth to the city of Luga,

How

prerequisites for further actions in the Baltics. The considerations of the Military Council of the Volkhov Front, presented to Headquarters on September 14, provided for a strike from the area north of Novgorod in the direction of the city of Luga in order to split the North group at the junction of its armies, to prevent the withdrawal of the main forces of the 18th Army to the line of the Luga River and beyond to the line Narva, Porkhov, and then, in cooperation with the troops of the Leningrad and North-Western fronts, encircle and destroy them.

Thus, the plan was based on the idea of delivering coordinated strikes from the north and southeast in the general direction to Luga with the aim of encircling and decisively defeating the army of the 18th German army.

The headquarters of the Supreme High Command approved the operational plans of the fronts with some changes, warning their commanders of a possible deliberate withdrawal of the enemy from Leningrad and the need to prepare in this regard not only to break through the defenses, but also to pursue the enemy.

Based on the general plan of the winter-spring campaign, the Headquarters expanded the tasks of the troops in the northwestern direction and attracted not only the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts, but also both Baltic fronts to the offensive. They were to

defeat the entire Army Group North, completely deblock Leningrad, clear the occupied areas of the Leningrad and Kalinin regions and create the necessary conditions for the occupation of the Baltic republics. The main efforts were concentrated in the zones of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts, which occupied an enveloping position in relation to the enemy grouping north of the Luga River. The strikes of these fronts, combined with a powerful offensive in the Right-Bank Ukraine, were supposed to pin down the enemy forces on the entire front, limit his ability to maneuver and lead to the most effective result.

At the end of November 1943, at a meeting in the Kremlin with the participation of the commanders of the fronts of the northwestern direction, the plan of the operation was finally worked out. The troops received specific combat missions and instructions on its planning and preparation. It was envisaged by coordinated simultaneous strikes of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts to first defeat the 18th Army, and by active actions of the 2nd Baltic to tie down the main forces of the 16th Army and the operational reserves of Army Group North. In the next, the troops of the three cooperating fronts were to defeat the 16th Army with an offensive on the Narva, Pskov and Idritsa directions. The Baltic Fleet, long-range aviation, the Leningrad Air Defense Army and partisan formations were involved in the operation.

Soviet sources drum in with suspicious unanimity that the 2nd Baltic Front was assigned missions of an exceptionally distracting and fettering nature. But this is exactly the case when the results achieved are presented as desired. After all, it was not without reason that the 8th Estonian Rifle Corps was concentrated in the rear of the 1st Shock Army, in the "carts" of which were members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the government of Estonia. And in the rear of the 22nd Army, with the active participation of comrades from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, the 43rd Latvian division was deployed into a rifle corps.

The command of the Leningrad Front planned to inflict two counter attacks on Ropsha: from the Oranienbaum bridgehead with the forces of the 2nd shock army and from the area south of Leningrad - the 42nd army, surrounding the German grouping, which consisted of the 3rd SS corps and the 50th army corps, in area Krasnoe Selo, Ropsha, Strelna.

Having united, they had to develop the offensive in two directions: Kingisepp, Narva and Krasnoarmeysk, Luga. The 67th Army received the task of actively tying down the enemy forces in the Mgin'sky direction and at the same time preparing an attack on Mga, Ulyanovsk, Krasnoarmeysk, in order, in cooperation with the 8th Army of the Volkhov Front, to surround and destroy the enemy troops operating there. The 13th Air Army, part of the Fleet Air Force, air defense and long-range aviation were supposed to cover and support the offensive of the 2nd shock and 42nd armies.

The command of the Volkhov Front decided with the forces of the 59th Army to deliver two strikes in converging directions around Novgorod: the main one - from the area southeast of Novgorod from the bridgehead on the western bank of the Volkhov, where the Germans were waiting for him, and the auxiliary with the forces of two rifle divisions and one brigade - across Lake Ilmen in the general direction to Lyubovlyany in order to encircle and destroy the Novgorod group. Subsequently, this army was to develop the offensive in the western and southwestern directions, cut off the withdrawal routes of the 18th Army troops to the south and southwest, and, in cooperation with the troops of the Leningrad Front, complete the defeat of its main forces. The 8th and 54th armies were to actively prevent the transfer of forces to the enemy from near Tosno, Lyuban, Chudovo to the Leningrad and Novgorod directions, further liberate the section of the Oktyabr'skaya railway Tosno - Chudovo and advance in the direction of Lyuban, Luga. The 14th Air Army was supposed to support the 59th Army with the main forces.

The Baltic Fleet was to ensure the concentration of troops of the 2nd shock army on the Oranienbaum bridgehead, naval and coastal artillery to help the Leningrad Front break into the enemy defenses and escort its troops to the limits of its range of fire, support the offensive of troops from the bridgehead with naval aviation.

Frontal and long-range aviation was to strike at enemy railway installations and airfields, his headquarters and reserves, fortifications at the rear and intermediate lines, to ensure the breakthrough of enemy defenses and the development of the offensive of troops in operational depth. The ADD allocated 8 aviation corps and 1 aviation division for preliminary aviation preparation of an offensive in the interests of the Leningrad Front and 4 aviation corps to support the troops of the fronts during the entire operation.

The army of air defense forces was tasked with covering Leningrad from the air, as well as strike groups, bases and communications of the Leningrad Front, blocking the enemy airfield hub in the Krasnogvardeisk region.

Leningrad partisans - 13 brigades with a total number of 35 thousand people - were supposed to conduct reconnaissance in the interests of the troops, assist in the capture of crossings, large settlements and railway junctions, intensify attacks on enemy communications, his headquarters and communication centers. The troops of Govorov and Meretskov, who had been on the defensive for a long time, had to break through a powerful, deeply echeloned defense and advance on wooded and swampy terrain, which made it difficult for troops to maneuver and massive use of heavy equipment. Under these conditions, careful advance preparation of headquarters and troops acquired particular importance. One and a half to two months before the offensive, command and staff games were held at the headquarters of the fronts with the leadership of formations, formations and units on topics related to the peculiarities of the organization of the operation, battles and command and control in the current situation.

In the rear areas, training camps were built that reproduced the enemy's defense in the areas of future breakthroughs. Soldiers learned to storm long-term firing points, overcome wire fences and minefields. Commanders of all levels worked out on the ground the organization of interaction between infantry, tanks and artillery. In aviation associations

issues of interaction between the branches of aviation, as well as with rifle and tank formations, were worked out. The "most advanced" Soviet military science returned to the experience of Suvorov during the assault on Izmail.

Rifle subunits were trained to attack directly behind the explosions of their artillery shells. Its density in the breakthrough areas reached 123 in the 2nd Shock Army, 138 in the 42nd, and 106 barrels of 76 mm caliber and above per kilometer of front in the 59th. In order to reliably suppress and destroy firing points, 492 guns were allocated for direct fire at the front line in the 42nd Army, and 221 in the 59th. Powerful artillery groups were created in the fronts and armies.

There was a "sappering" of the troops: several people in each platoon were trained to cut wire obstacles, find and neutralize mines, block roads, lay gati, and pull out stuck equipment. Only on the Leningrad front, more than 30,000 fighters underwent such training.

Most of the tank units were transferred to the combined arms armies, inflicting the main blow, for use as direct infantry support and in army mobile groups. Landing groups of submachine gunners were assigned to the tanks.

The armies were replenished with personnel, weapons and equipment.

At the same time, the troops regrouped to create shock groups. The 2nd shock army was secretly transported on ships from Leningrad to the Oranienbaum region. The Primorsky bridgehead was to play an important role. If south of the city, from the Pulkovo direction, the Germans expected a Soviet offensive, then a strike from the Oranienbaum bridgehead should have been a surprise. From November to January, Baltic sailors brought here in severe weather conditions 53,000 people, 658 guns, many tanks, vehicles, over 700 wagons of ammunition and other cargo. Through the Gulf of Finland, in full view of the enemy, 5 rifle divisions, 13 artillery units and formations, 2 tank and 1 self-propelled artillery regiment, 1 tank brigade were transported to the bridgehead. At the same time, the Germans were misled: until the last moment, they believed that the Soviet command was transferring troops from the bridgehead to the city.

In general, this time they prepared carefully and competently. Two and a half years of unsuccessful head-scratching and bloodletting paid off. The Soviet generals learned something. Although the battle for Leningrad cost one and a half million killed, wounded and captured soldiers.

Loss data are taken from a statistical study edited by General G.F. Krivoshein. So - the official data of the Russian General Staff. The collection was compiled "primarily on the reports of the fronts, armies and other active groupings of troops." However, the authors themselves admit that "reports about the loss of people and military equipment often did not reach higher commanders and headquarters, and sometimes there was no one to report to ... Sometimes the entire payroll of a formation or association had to be included in the number of irretrievable losses ...".

But what about those who "were not on the list"? In the first days of the war, numerous columns of conscripts marched in the border districts under German bombardment. Someone ran away and found himself already behind enemy lines, someone fell directly into military units and immediately rushed into battle. Who took them into account, or at least counted them? Documents of many military units and formations perished or were destroyed due to the threat of capture by the enemy. In 1941, the Red Army lost 177 divisions and 18 brigades defeated and destroyed.

Where and in what sheets are the losses of the volunteer divisions of 1941] or the destruction battalion of the Stalingrad Tractor Battalion taken into account? Mobilized right on the battlefield "conscripts" Konev model 1944?

The order of the NPO dated April 12, 1942 stated: "Accounting for personnel, in particular accounting for losses, is completely unsatisfactory in the active army ... At present, no more than one third of the actual number of those killed is on personal records. The personal records of the missing and captured are even more far from the truth. All this speaks for the fact that the armies and fronts have not established proper control over the recording and presentation of this information.

The main reason for this attitude was precisely the fact that for our commanders this was not the main thing. Soldiers for them were not people, but "manpower", the mass. What to count it? Yes, and there was no time for the generals to deal with nonsense, they thought about saving the Motherland day and night. In addition, unaccounted for losses did not spoil the "indicators".

Families of missing soldiers have been told about the "difficulties" for decades. At first, keeping a personal record of losses was hindered by "the rapid advance of the Nazi troops deep into Soviet territory and their encirclement of a number of our operational formations." Later, "under conditions of high

the pace of the offensive of our troops, sometimes accompanied by significant losses of personnel, the organization of registration and burial of the dead was extremely complicated. In a word, it doesn't matter whether we were advancing swiftly or rapidly draping: there was still no time to count and bury the fallen.

For example, in a note addressed to the Chief of the General Staff dated June 24, 1942, it was reported:

"In subdivisions and parts of the 18th division. The Rifle Brigade of the 43rd Army does not have books of the established form for recording personnel. There is no accounting of personnel in subdivisions and parts of the brigade.

At the headquarters of the 686th artillery regiment of the 415th rifle division, there are no lists of personnel according to the established forms. Arrived replenishment is not included in the lists. Most of the Red Army personnel do not have Red Army books, and those issued to the fighters are not taken into account.

In military units, the loss of personnel has not been precisely established, and notices to families about those killed in battles are not sent. Often, without any verification, some fighters are included in the lists of deserters, killed and missing.

The army was commanded by General K.D. Golubev, the country should know its "heroes".

It was only on February 4, 1944 that the "Guidelines for Recording Personnel (in Wartime)" were introduced, which, in particular, for the first time in Soviet history, prescribed monuments to be erected at the burial places of military personnel and even "with indications of military ranks, surnames, names and patronymics of the dead, as well as the date of their death. However, a year later, in the order of the People's Commissar of Defense, it was noted that "the military councils of the fronts, armies and districts do not pay due attention to this important issue." Only in Belarus, where more than a million soldiers and officers are "fraternally" buried, one out of five was honored with a surname on the monument. For the first two post-war years, the Department for Recording the Losses of NCOs and Enlisted Personnel issued about two million notices of dead and missing soldiers and officers based on correspondence with relatives, military units and hospitals. But even today, sixty years later, the remains of the soldiers of that war are found by tens and hundreds.

For this reason, most researchers who are not assigned to official departments reasonably believe that the given loss figures should be multiplied by a factor of 1.5-2.

The command of the 2nd Baltic Front planned to first defeat the enemy grouping north of Nevel, and then, by advancing the troops of the left wing to Idritsa and north of Novosokolniki, cut the roadways leading from these points to the north and south, tie down the main forces of the 16th army and prevent its transfer

connections near Leningrad and Novgorod. Subsequently, it was supposed to launch an offensive in the directions of Opochna and Sebezh.

However, here the preparation for the offensive was carried out hastily and bore all the signs, in Stalin's words, of an "indiscriminate offensive." A small enemy was supposed to be simply crushed by quantity.

Literally the day before, on January 8, the front-line operation ended with the forces of the 3rd shock and 6th guards armies to eliminate the "Nevel bottle" and pursue the enemy in the Novosokolniki direction. The troops suffered losses and were firmly stuck in the wooded, swampy and lake areas in the southeast of the Pskov region. Nevertheless, the task was set before the 3rd strike



break through the Wasteland to Opochna; readiness for a new offensive was set for January 9th. To the left, the 10th Guards Army transferred from the Western Front under the command of Lieutenant General A.V. Sukhomlin. She had to break through the enemy defenses in the inter-lake defile Nevedro - Gusino, and then advance on Zilupe, bypassing Idritsa from the south and southwest. Since the army was still on the march, it was supposed to be put into action in parts, as the divisions approached. Thus, the troops of General Sukhomlin had to strike on unfamiliar terrain, without knowing the situation, the enemy defense system, without having worked out the system of interaction between rifle and artillery units - all in the "best traditions" of 1941-1942. According to the plan, the 22nd Army of Lieutenant General V.A. Yushkevich, bypassing Novosokolniki from the north, went to Nasva, Mamaevo. On the right wing of the front, it was supposed to start diverting actions a day before the main attack.

German intelligence clearly tracked, and the German command with a sufficient degree of reliability predicted the intentions of the enemy. Assessing the situation in the zone of Army Group North, in early December 1943, it noted that "the long-discovered preparations for the offensive of the Volkhov and Leningrad fronts, apparently, are systematically continuing ... Novgorod-Volkhov bridgehead and areas south of Leningrad, Oranienbaum. It was assumed that the Soviet troops would strive as early as possible to block the 18th Army's retreat to the Baltic regions, to capture the cities of Luga, Pskov, Krasnogvardeisk (Gatchina), Narva. Therefore, the Germans paid special attention to improving the defensive lines precisely in the directions of the alleged main attacks of the Soviet troops.

In this regard, the statement of Marshal K.A. looks somewhat ridiculous. Meretskova: "Now it's not the enemy, but we dictated our will: we attacked where we wanted; accurately determined the timing and scale of the battles. How many of these "terms" were determined and "scales" were established during the war? In the meantime, the Red Army again, for the umpteenth time, had to gnaw through the defense in depth, relying on their numerical superiority.

The troops of the three fronts allocated for the operation numbered 1,252,000 people, 20,183 guns and mortars, 1,580 tanks and self-propelled guns, 1,386 combat aircraft.

Field Marshal Küchler could oppose them with 741,000 men, 10,070 guns and mortars, 385 tanks and assault guns, and 370 aircraft.

716,000 Soviet soldiers and officers, 12,165 guns and mortars (excluding anti-aircraft and rocket artillery), 1,132 tanks and self-propelled guns acted against the 18th Army. General Lindemann had up to 4,500 guns and mortars, up to 200 tanks and assault guns, about 168,000 people. A true Nazi, he is clearly

underestimated the power of the intended Soviet offensive and overestimated the ability of his divisions, five of which were Luftwaffe field divisions of little use for combat. Thus, the troops of Govorov and Meretskov outnumbered the enemy in terms of personnel and artillery three times, and six times in tanks.

With a fairly clear idea of the brewing situation, von Küchler turned to Hitler with a request to be allowed to lift the blockade of Leningrad and retreat west to the Panther line before the Soviet command launched another massive attack against the 18th Army. Such a redeployment could reduce

the length of defensive lines for 200 km. But when the Fuhrer summoned Lindemann to him, the latter confidently declared that his army was able to withstand any Russian blow. Hitler, who heard exactly what he wanted, believed the general and refused to comply with the request of the field marshal. His armies could only stand to the death and hope for the strength of the Northern Wall.

The advance of Soviet troops to the initial areas for the offensive was carried out within three to four nights before the start of the operation, in compliance with strict camouflage measures.

The troops of the 2nd Baltic Front were the first to act. On January 11, private offensive operations of his right wing began. The next day, after a thirty-minute artillery preparation, the armies of the left wing, the main forces of the front, went on the offensive. On January 12, the formations of the 3rd shock army, Colonel-General N.E. Chibisov and the 10th Guards attacked the enemy southwest of Novosokolnikov, two days later the army of General V.A. Yushkevich struck north of the city. On the same day, on the right flank, the 1st Shock Army launched an offensive south of Staraya Russa.

On January 14, the troops of General Govorov went on the offensive - 30 rifle divisions, 3 rifle and 4 tank brigades, 3 fortified areas, numbering 417,000 people. From the side of the enemy, in front of the Leningrad Front, there were 8 infantry, 2 airfield, 1 motorized division and 1 motorized brigade.

Despite difficult meteorological conditions, ADD bombers took off the night before the attack. 109 aircraft bombed enemy troops and long-range artillery near the village of Bezzabotny, north of Krasnoye Selo. In the morning the Soviet artillery spoke.

Attack of the units of the 2nd shock army of General I.I. Fedyuninsky began at 10.40 with the support of naval aviation, the fire of the Kronstadt forts and ships of the fleet. The main blow in the 10-kilometer strip, to the sounds of a brass band, was delivered by six rifle divisions, reinforced by escort tanks. The command of the 3rd SS Corps, which was defending in the offensive zone of the army, overcame the confusion, managed to establish command and control of the troops and organize resistance. The corps, consisting of the 11th Panzergrenadier Division "Nordland", the SS Infantry Division and the almost useless 9th and 10th Airfield Divisions, was commanded by Felix Steiner. From the unsuppressed firing points, the Germans unleashed a flurry of fire on the attackers, launched several counterattacks with the forces of the approaching reserves. Fierce battles ensued for every meter. In one day on January 15, Fedyuninsky's troops repelled up to 30 counterattacks. Only on the third day, having introduced the army tank reserve and units of the second echelon into battle, with the support of aviation, the Soviet troops managed to complete the breakthrough of the main line of defense and expand it to 23 km along the front. Having mastered the key road junctions in the area of the Hotel, Dyatlitsa, the rifle formations of the first echelon made their way to a depth of 8-10 km and rushed to Ropsha.

The offensive of the 42nd Army of General I.I. Maslennikov began on January 15. But

as the enemy's main line of defense was saturated with many long-term structures, the destruction of which required great efforts, heavy artillery opened fire on them a day earlier. On the day of the offensive, artillery preparation was carried out from 09:20 to 11:00. During this time, more than 220 thousand shells and mines were fired at German positions. Clearing the way for the attacking troops, attack aircraft of the 13th Air Army of General S.D. Rybalchenko continuously struck at the enemy in the tactical zone, bomber aircraft - at the troops in the depths of defense. The fighters covered their actions and the offensive of the ground forces.

troops.

The Germans, relying on a powerful defensive line, put up fierce resistance. On the first day, the troops of General Maslennikov advanced 1.5-4.5 km. Only by the end of January 17, after entering the battle of a mobile group consisting of two reinforced tank brigades, they broke through the main line of defense of the 50th Army Corps, advanced up to 10 km and wedged into the second line. There was an opportunity to develop the offensive in the direction of Ropsha.

On this day, the German command, anticipating the encirclement of its troops operating in the areas of Krasnoe Selo, Ropsha and Uritsk, began their withdrawal in a southerly direction. During the retreat, the enemy put up stubborn resistance. Ignoring losses, he immediately threw reserves into battle, massed artillery and air strikes at the sites of the breakthrough of Soviet troops, and sought to definitely delay their offensive. Having spent in the first two days of fighting not only tactical, but also his operational reserve - the 61st Infantry Division, Lindemann transferred three infantry divisions and construction units to the offensive zone of the 42nd Army from Mga, Chudov and other sectors of the front.

It was necessary to break the resistance of the enemy as soon as possible and not give him the opportunity to slip out of the already outlined cauldron. For this purpose, the second echelons and the mobile group of the army, which included two reinforced tank brigades, were introduced into the battle. Particularly fierce battles flared up on the outskirts of Krasnoye Selo for a strong knot of resistance to Voronya Gora.

Finally, on the morning of January 19, the 42nd Army captured Krasnoe Selo, and the 2nd Shock Army captured Ropsha. The mobile groups of both armies rushed towards each other and by the end of the day they united in the Russko-Vysokoye region, closing the ring around the Krasnoselsko Ropshinsky group. However, it was not possible to create a dense encirclement front. Throughout the night of January 20, the Germans infiltrated in small groups in a southerly direction. The remnants of the group were destroyed the next day:

As a result, the troops of the 2nd shock and 42nd armies advanced to a depth of more than 25 km and formed a common offensive front. This made it possible to improve the command and control of troops and their supply, expanded the possibilities of maneuvering forces and means, and created conditions for the development of an offensive in the Kingisepp and Luga directions. The 9th and 10th airfield divisions were completely destroyed, five more suffered heavy losses. The enemy, according to Soviet data, lost 21 thousand people killed and captured. Among the trophies were 85 heavy guns (caliber from 150 to 400 mm), which were shelling Leningrad.

Events near Novgorod developed no less tensely.

Here, the troops of the Volkhov Front - 22 rifle divisions, 6 rifle, 4 tank brigades, 2 fortified areas, a total of 260,000 people - were opposed by 3 airfield, 6 infantry divisions and 2 infantry brigades from the 18th Army. 79 settlement battalions were located behind several lines of deeply dispersed defense and relied on a number of powerful centers of resistance, among which Mga, Tosno, Lyuban, Chudovo, and Novgorod stood out in particular. The largest

the density of defense was in the Novgorod and Chudovsky directions. Behind the front edge of the main defensive strip, stretching along the Novgorod-Chudovo highway, there was a second strip, along the Krest River, and cut-off lines were located between them, blocking the exits from the wooded and swampy fashion shows. Direct approaches to Novgorod from the east were covered by three lines of fortifications. The depth of the main defensive line was six kilometers. Inner belt of fortifications

passed along the ancient city rampart, and stone buildings adapted to long-term resistance were used.

The plan of the upcoming operation was to deliver two blows by the 59th Army: the main one - from the bridgehead on the Volkhov River and the auxiliary forces of two rifle divisions and one brigade - from the area southeast of Novgorod across Lake Ilmen in converging directions to Lyubolyady in order to surround and destroy the most powerful Novgorod grouping of the enemy and liberate Novgorod. Subsequently, developing the offensive in the western and southwestern directions, the 59th Army was to capture the city of Luga, cut off the escape routes of the German troops towards Pskov and, in cooperation with other armies of the Volkhov and Leningrad Fronts, complete the defeat of the main forces of the 18th Army. The troops of the 8th and 54th armies were to pin down the enemy forces opposing them and prevent their transfer to Novgorod, and then go on the offensive in the general direction of Luga.

"Precisely determining the timing and scale," they hoped to liberate Novgorod and its environs in the first six days, to reach the eastern bend of the Luga River on the tenth day, and ten days later to deploy the main forces to the southwest and, pursuing the enemy in the direction of Pskov and Island, on his shoulders to break into the Baltic. At the same time, one army was going to be transferred across Lake Peipsi to strike at Tartu.

To deliver a powerful ramming attack, Meretskov concentrated more than half of the forces of the Volkhov Front on the left flank. As part of the 59th Army, Lieutenant General I.T. Korovnikov included 9 rifle divisions, 1 rifle brigade, the 150th fortified area and reinforcements. The operational density reached no more than 4 km per division, there was not enough artillery, only 100 barrels per kilometer of the front. Behind was a reserve - the 7th Rifle Corps and a separate tank brigade.

As a result, superiority over the enemy in infantry - 3.3, artillery - 3.5 and tanks - 11 times was achieved in the 59th Army zone. Soviet aviation dominated the air.

The Germans were on the defensive with units of the 38th Rifle Corps, which had 18 guns and mortars per kilometer. On the western bank of the Ilmen, positions were occupied by separate units of "Lithuanian and Estonian fascists."

The offensive of the troops of the 59th Army began on January 14. Due to bad weather, the aircraft of the 14th Air Army could not take off. Snowfall and a blizzard made it difficult for the artillery to carry out a 110-minute artillery preparation. Most of the strongholds and artillery batteries of the enemy remained unsuppressed. The tanks were stuck in a swamp: a sudden thaw, unusual for January, turned the bushy, hummocky ice fields into a muddy mess. The Germans offered stubborn resistance, the attacking units were met with heavy fire. The main forces of the 59th Army, advancing from the bridgehead, on the first day wedged into the defense of the German troops only by 600-1000 m.

More successfully that day, the offensive developed in the auxiliary direction south of Novgorod, where units of the 58th separate rifle brigade, reinforced by two airborne battalions, under the command of Major General T.A. Sviklin on the night of January 14 crossed the lake on fragile ice

Ilmen and a sudden night attack captured a number of enemy strongholds. By the end of the day, they expanded the captured bridgehead to 6 km along the front and up to 4 km in depth.

On January 15, to develop success in the auxiliary direction, General Korovnikov brought into battle a rifle division and a battalion of armored vehicles. Due to fresh connections, the impact force was also increased in the main direction. Here, another rifle division, two tank brigades and a self-propelled artillery regiment were thrown into battle. By the end of January 16, army troops had broken through the main line of enemy defense north of Novgorod and intercepted the Chudovo-Novgorod road, and cut off the Novgorod-Shimsk road to the south of the city. For three days of stubborn fighting in the direction of the main attack, the breakthrough was expanded to 20 km along the front and up to 8 km in depth. The threat of encirclement loomed over the Novgorod grouping of German troops.

On this day, in the Luban direction, the troops of the 54th Army, Lieutenant General S.V., went on the offensive. Roginsky, who made it difficult for the enemy to begin the transfer of forces from the Mga and Chudovo regions to the breakthrough site.

Maneuvering forces, Field Marshal Kuchler pulled connections from other sectors of the front to the breakthrough site. Parts 24, 21, 290, 8-

th infantry divisions, separate cavalry and construction units. The enemy continuously counterattacked, trying to prevent the connection of the northern and southern groups of the 59th army.

The offensive developed slowly and heavily. The wooded and swampy terrain, impassability, the beginning of the thaw and the increased resistance of the enemy required the utmost exertion of moral and physical strength. The soldiers were carrying guns, mortars and ammunition. The main burden of the fighting fell on the shoulders of the infantrymen. Artillery and tanks often lagged behind, the aviation of the 14th Air Army had to limit combat activity due to bad weather.

On January 18, the second echelon of the 59th Army was introduced into the battle, which had the task of advancing from Podberezye to the west and, in cooperation with the army of General Roginsky, defeat the enemy's Luban-Chudov grouping.

In heavy fighting, Korovnikov's troops broke the enemy's resistance, cut off all highways and railways coming from Novgorod, and captured the city on the morning of January 20. At the same time, the northern and southern groups of troops united in the Gorynev area, completing the encirclement of the scattered units of the Novgorod grouping of the enemy that did not have time to withdraw and, together with the 7th rifle corps, brought into battle from the front reserve, destroyed them. German troops left on the battlefield up to 15 thousand killed, 3200 soldiers and officers were taken prisoner.

On January 19, Moscow saluted the troops of the Leningrad Front, on the 20th - Volkhov.

The defeat of the flank groupings of the 18th Army and the clear threat of encirclement of its formations in the center of the operational formation forced Kuchler to order the army to withdraw from the Mga, Tosno region. On the night of January 21, hiding behind strong rearguards and engineering barriers, the Germans began to retreat. 67th Army Lieutenant General V.P. Sviridov and the 8th Army of Lieutenant General F.N. Starikov, acting at the junction of fronts, immediately began the pursuit.

This ended the first phase of the operation.

The actions of the 2nd Baltic Front undoubtedly contributed to the successful completion of the immediate tasks by the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts, but none of Popov's own army tasks were completed.

Thus, the 10th Guards advanced only 6-8 km in six days of continuous fighting. The army included 9 rifle divisions, the 27th artillery division, the 27th

I

guards mortar brigade, three separate tank and two artillery regiments.

On the German side, one regiment of the 132nd Infantry Division and two separate penal battalions, supported by seven artillery batteries, defended in the breakthrough sector. The relatively low density of the German troops was compensated by the favorable conditions of defense and the stupidity of the organization on the attacking side (although the historiographers of the 10th Guards also complain about the lack of artillery!). Army General M.I. Kazakov recalled:

"In the offensive zone, the Nazis did not have a continuous front. The defense consisted of separate strongholds and centers of resistance. The troops also broke through it as a continuous frontier. Therefore, already during the artillery preparation, a large number of shells fell on empty space. Then the infantry attacked the gaps that were not occupied by anyone and fell under the flank fire of enemy strongholds.

The army was brought into battle by echelon on unfamiliar terrain, and the second echelon - at night, units and subunits strayed from the given directions, lost contact with headquarters and neighbors. There was no interaction with artillery, there was little use from tanks in the swamps. In addition, the thaw that had begun completely spoiled the roads, weakened the ice cover of numerous swamps and lakes, making maneuver even more difficult. And the infantry is in boots. It was worth the Germans on January 16 to additionally pull up the 263rd Infantry Division to this sector, and the offensive of the guards finally fizzled out.

Things were no better in the 3rd shock division - 5 rifle divisions, 3 rifle divisions, 1 tank brigade - advancing at a speed of 2-3 km per day.

For nine days, the fighting in the Novosokolniki region did not subside. Two armies - the 6th Guards, the 22nd Combined Arms - unsuccessfully fought against the indestructible defense of the 43rd Army Corps.

In the yoke on the southern flank, Popov's front did not achieve territorial successes. In the center, they succeeded in capturing the Nasva station by cutting off the Novosokolniki-Dno road. On the northern wing, the 1st Shock Army did not advance a single step. Nevertheless, the activity of the 2nd Baltic Front forced the command of Army Group North to bring three divisions from its reserve into battle, and also made it possible to pin down the main forces of the 16th German army. Idritsa and Novosokolniki remained impregnable.

On January 20, Stalin, expressing to Popov his dissatisfaction with the actions of the front, recommended that General Sukhomlin be removed, allowed to stop the deadlocked offensive in the Idritsa direction and regroup forces. This time the commander of the 2nd Baltic Front decided to concentrate the efforts of the 22nd and 10th Guards Armies in one area - Nasva, Novosokolniki. In this regard, the 10th Guards had to move 50-70 km to the north and take positions to the right of the 6th Guards Army. To mask the movement of formations from the flank to

the center of the front, the divisions of the first echelon of the army were left in place and included in the 3rd shock division. Instead, guards divisions from other armies were transferred to the 10th Guards. Now, with the forces of three armies, it was planned to defeat the enemy's Novosokolniki grouping and, bypassing Pustoshka and Idritsa from the north, develop an offensive against Opochka. It was scheduled to start on January 30th.

On January 22, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command approved the considerations for the further conduct of the operation of the Military Council of the Leningrad Front. Considering the withdrawal of enemy troops from the Mginsk sector and the transfer of part of them to

the region of Krasnogvardeisk and Volosov, the front command decided to capture Krasnogvardeisk in the first place, liberate the section of the Oktyabrskaya railway to Tosno, cut off the escape routes of the Luban-Tosno enemy grouping and destroy it in cooperation with the troops of the Volkhov Front; after that, develop the main blow in a southwestern direction to Kingisepp, Narva, and the auxiliary one - to

Siversky, covering the left flank of the 18th Army and depriving it of access to the Narva direction.

The troops of the 2nd Shock Army, developing the offensive in the Kingisepp direction, on January 27 by night assault captured the Volosovo station on the Kingisepp Krasnogvardeisk railway. The most difficult task faced the 42nd and 67th armies. On their way there were such powerful nodes of resistance as the cities of Pushkin, Slutsk (Pavlovsk), Krasnogvardeysk, Mga and others. Having made a deep detour of Pushkin and Slutsk, General Maslennikov's units on the morning of January 24 liberated these cities with a simultaneous attack from the front and rear.

Stubborn battles flared up for Krasnogvardeysk. On the night of January 26, the assault on the city began. Knocking out the enemy from the cellars and attics of stone houses, the fighters liberated quarter after quarter. By morning the city was taken.

The main target for the Volkhov Front was the city of Luga, an important communications center in the rear of the 18th Army. The headquarters demanded that the troops of the left wing liberate the city no later than January 29-30, reach the Luga-Soltsy line and, in cooperation with Govorov's troops, encircle and destroy the enemy's Luga grouping. In order to improve command and control on February 25, the field administration of the 8th Army was transferred to the Luga direction, which led two rifle corps transferred from the 59th Army. Thus, the 8th Army, in its new composition, has now turned from the extreme right into the left flank and launched an attack on the Peredolskaya station.

The former formations of General Starikov were reassigned to the 54th Army, which on the right wing was to take Lyuban no later than January 23-24 and assist the troops of the Leningrad Front in capturing Tosno and advancing to Siversky. On January 26, the troops of the 54th Army liberated Tosno, and then Lyuban and Chudovo. The Oktyabrskaya railway was released along its entire length. The main forces of General Roginsky also rushed to Luga.

At the same time, the 59th Army, having launched an offensive on Batetsky and Luga, broke the resistance of the enemy, who was trying to hold the line of the Oredezh-Dno railway, along which the Lyuban-Chudovskaya group, which was under the threat of encirclement, was supposed to withdraw. By the end of the day on January 26, the troops of General Korovnikov reached the upper reaches of the Luga, seized a bridgehead on its western bank, and cut the Leningrad-Dno railway in the area north of the Peredolskaya station. On January 27, the 8th Army entered Peredolskaya, liberated by the 5th Partisan Brigade.

With the liberation of the cities of Pushkin, Krasnogvardeysk, Lyuban, Chudovo and the October Railway, the blockade of Leningrad was completely eliminated. The unparalleled epic of the defense of the city, which withstood a 900-day siege, has ended.

By January 30, the troops of Govorov and Meretskov broke into the defenses of the 18th Army on a 300-kilometer front, advanced 60-100 km with fighting, reached the enemy defensive line along the Luga River and cut the enemy's most important communications. Seeing a real threat of encirclement of the remnants of the 18th Army, whose losses reached 31,000 (including 14,000 killed), the commander of Army Group North

began to withdraw them in the western and south-western directions.

Hopes to hold the Northern Wall irretrievably collapsed. Hitler approved Küchler's order of January 30, but the next day he summoned the field marshal to his headquarters and removed him from command without involving him in further work. On January 31, General Walter Model, Hitler's "firefighter", was appointed the new commander of Army Group North. The troops were tasked with stopping the offensive of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts on the defensive line along

the Luga River, to retain the Luga-Pskov railway and highway, necessary for the withdrawal of formations of the 18th Army to the rear defensive line "Panther". The motorized and 12th tank divisions from Army Group Center were transferred to the Luga line, and the infantry division from the 16th Army.

The Germans did not allow themselves to be surrounded and managed to withdraw the defeated formations of the 18th Army beyond the Luga. Having created a strong grouping, they offered stubborn resistance to the Soviet troops.

On January 30, large-scale reconnaissance was carried out in a number of sectors of the 2nd Baltic Front. And the next day, the troops of General Popov went on the offensive in the direction of Novosokolniki - Opochna.

Again it was necessary to advance in very difficult conditions, over very rugged terrain with a thick snow cover, cut up by numerous beams filled with water. The heights and approaches to them were covered with forest and shrubs. For tanks such terrain was almost impassable, and the whole burden of the offensive again fell on the shoulders of the infantry. And again they hoped to crush the enemy with quantity.

The main blow south of the Novosokolniki-Mayevoy highway was delivered by the significantly reinforced 10th Guards Army. It now included 14 rifle divisions, consolidated into five corps, the 29th and 78th tank brigades, 5 separate tank regiments, the 2nd artillery corps, the 6th guards anti-tank brigade, the 21st guards mortar brigade M-30 and 4 separate regiments of rocket artillery.

The site of the alleged breakthrough occupied only 7.5 km along the front. Within these boundaries, the rifle divisions of the 15th and 7th guards corps were cut into strips 1200-1300 m wide. And the 19th guards corps, advancing on the left flank of the army, received only 600-800 m per division. account of individual tank regiments. Behind the 7th Corps was the 100th Guards, which was intended to develop success. The 96th Rifle Corps delivered an auxiliary blow on the right flank.

In this strip, from the German side, the defense was occupied by units of the 83rd and 23rd infantry divisions, as well as the 14th penal and consolidated construction battalions. The depth of the first strip was 4–6 km. The second one ran north of the Novosokolniki-Mayevoy railroad. The defense consisted of a well-organized system of centers of resistance, the basis of which were settlements and dominant heights. However, its saturation with firepower did not exceed 15-20 machine guns and 12-15 guns and mortars per kilometer of front. Soviet intelligence did not find operational reserves of the enemy in the immediate vicinity.

However, due to the brevity of the time allotted for preparation, the army headquarters had rather meager data on the enemy: the general outline of the front line, the location of a small number of machine-gun emplacements, and some areas of artillery batteries were known. Therefore, only 30 percent of Soviet artillery was allocated to suppress specific firing points.



The bulk of the artillery was supposed to suppress target areas during the period of artillery preparation and attack escort.

Thus, the 10th Guards Army, commanded by Lieutenant General M.I. Kazakov, had absolute superiority over the enemy both in firepower and in strike force. Only in the first echelon of the army there were six divisions, and the density of the artillery grouping reached 180 barrels per kilometer of the front. A specially formed counter-battery group consisted of up to 200 guns of 122 and 152 mm caliber.

To the left, the army of General Chistyakov struck at Maevo.

However, progress was extremely slow. Troops advanced

forward two, sometimes one kilometer a day. The greatest success was achieved by the 15th Guards Corps of General N.G. Khoruzhenko. On the first day, he advanced to a depth of 6 km, by the end of the third day of the operation he reached the second defensive line. However, the left-flank 7th and 19th Guards Corps lagged far behind, in part because an attempt by the neighbors of the 6th Guards Army to break through the enemy defenses failed. In order not to fall under a flank attack, instead of advancing with all his forces strictly to the north, General Kazakov had to deploy part of the divisions with the front to the west. As early as February 1, divisions of the second echelon and tank brigades had to be thrown into battle; on the night of February 5, the 100th rifle corps was introduced into the battle.

Finally, the 29th Guards Division made a breakthrough towards the right neighbor and on February 7 connected with the advanced units of the 22nd Army in the area of the Minkino state farm, after which the Germans hastily cleared the Novosokolniki ledge. On February 8, the troops of the 10th Guards Army, on the instructions of the front commander, began to regroup towards the Shetkovo line in order to continue the offensive in a northwestern direction. On the morning of February 11, the guards attacked the enemy and captured the strongholds of the first line. In the next two days, Struga, Veshnya, and Ivanovo were liberated. There was no further development of the offensive.

Thus, having advanced 15-20 km and liberated the city of Novosokolniki, the center of the 2nd Baltic Front reached the Nasva-Maevo line by mid-February. There were still 70 km to OPOCHKA. By this time, the Germans had transferred additional units of the 290th and 205th infantry divisions to the breakthrough area, separate infantry and construction battalions, and with organized fire at previously prepared lines, stopped the advance of the Soviet troops.

In early February, south of Staraya Russa, the 1st shock army again went on the offensive, and again without much success. The 16th German Army firmly held its positions.

The main efforts of the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts in early February were directed at overcoming the Luga defensive line.

The armies of General Govorov developed the offensive in three directions: the 2nd shock - on Kingisepp, Narva, the 42nd - on Gdov and Struga Krasnye, the 67th - on Luga from the north. I had to operate in difficult off-road conditions. During the withdrawal, the enemy destroyed bridges, blew up ice on rivers and swamps, arranged forest blockages, mined roads, and left a large number of booby traps in settlements. Nevertheless, the offensive of the Soviet troops developed successfully. Formations of the 2nd Shock Army, with the support of the aviation of the Baltic Fleet, crossed Luga south of Kingisepp and on February 1, as a result of a skillful detour maneuver and a night assault, captured the city. Pursuing the retreating enemy, on February 3 they crossed the Narva River, captured bridgeheads on its left bank and began fighting for their expansion.

Soviet troops thus entered the territory of Estonia.

The 42nd Army crossed the Luga, on February 4 entered Gdov, liberated by the partisans, and by the middle of the month reached Lake Peipus and Struga Krasny. Formations of the 67th Army, developing a strike on the city of Luga, by the end of February 8, covered the Luga grouping of the enemy from the west and north.

On February 8, the 54th Army of the Volkhov Front captured Oredezh, the next day its field command was transferred to the left flank of the front.

The 59th Army was advancing on Luga from the east, and the 8th Army was bypassing the city from the southeast, part of its forces providing a strike grouping of the front from Shimsk.

Intense battles unfolded for communications south and east of the city of Luga and for mastering this important center of resistance. The enemy strengthened this direction in every possible way at the expense of reserves and troops retreating from Leningrad. They had to advance through forests and swamps, often off-road. The troops broke away from the bases

supplies; there was an acute shortage of ammunition, fuel and food, and there was a lack of vehicles. Tank and self-propelled artillery units suffered significant losses and could not provide significant assistance to the rifle troops. All this had a negative impact on the pace of the offensive. Only by the end of February 12, Korovnikov's army reached the Luga River in the entire strip. With part of the forces, she continued to advance towards the city of Luga, and with the rest she launched an offensive in a southerly direction.

The 8th Army struck in the direction of Utorgosh - Struga Krasnye, cutting off the retreat of the 18th Army. In order to preserve the only communication for the withdrawal of the Luga group, the Germans created at the junction of their 18th and 16th armies an operational group of troops under General Hans Frisner, who was directly subordinate to Model. Frisner, taking advantage of the passivity of the right wing of the 2nd Baltic Front, received the 121st Infantry Division from the 16th Army and, throwing the 12th Panzer and 285th Security Divisions towards it, launched a counterattack on Starikov's troops in converging directions from Luga to southeast and from Utorgosh to the northwest. With this maneuver, the Germans managed to cut off the advanced formations of the 7th Rifle Corps from the main forces. The 256th and separate units of the 372nd rifle divisions, as well as a regiment of a partisan brigade, were surrounded. Commander of the 256th Rifle Division A.G. Koziev organized a circular defense and held the occupied area for twelve hours until units of the 8th and 59th armies broke through.

Relying on a pre-prepared defensive line along the Mshaga River, the enemy managed to keep the Luga-Pskov highway in his hands for some time and withdraw a significant part of the troops along it from under Luga. The city was liberated only on February 12 by the 67th Army of the Leningrad Front with the assistance of the 59th Army of the Volkhov Front. By mid-February, the troops had completely overcome the defensive line along the Luga River.

In the midst of intense fighting from January 31 to February 15, the troops of the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts advanced 50-120 km in various directions, reached the line of the Narva River, north of Lake Pskovskoye, Seredka, Plyussa, Shimsk.

On February 15, due to the fact that the width of the offensive zone was significantly reduced, the Volkhov Front was disbanded. Its management was withdrawn to the reserve of the Headquarters, the armies were transferred to the Leningrad Front. At the same time, the directorates of the 59th and 8th armies were sequentially withdrawn to the reserve of the front and transferred to the Narva direction.

One more stroke. According to Meretskov, he really did not want to take

command at a time when the main difficulties seemed to have been overcome and a victorious offensive loomed ahead: "... I even figured something out in advance, planning how the Volkhovites would begin to liberate Estonia and Latvia, and possibly Belarus." True, at the same time, the marshal does not remember that all the "strict deadlines" have already passed. Apparently, Govorov also dreamed of the laurels of the winner of Army Group North, since, according to General of the Army Shtemenko, it was Govorov who proposed disbanding the Volkhov Front: "He believed that in the interests of the unity of command and control of troops in the Pskov direction, the entire strip of the Volkhov Front should be transferred to him. The headquarters agreed with this. But, as it turned out later, it was a mistake.

The losses of the Volkhov Front during the operation amounted to 50,300 people killed and wounded.

In the replenished composition, the troops of the Leningrad Front continued the offensive in two operational directions - Narva and Pskov. The rate on February 22 set new tasks. The armies of the right wing were to liberate the city of Narva and break through the Narva fortified area. After that, one of the armies should

advance on Pärnu in order to cut off the escape route of the Tallinn enemy grouping to the south, and with two - in the directions of Viljandi, Valga and Tartu, Vyr. The left wing of the front was to continue the non-stop pursuit of the enemy in the Pskov and Ostrov directions in order to prevent him from withdrawing his troops to the Panther rear defensive line and organizing a tough defense there. His main efforts were concentrated on capturing the Ostrov region bypassing Pskov and forcing the Velikaya River, after which it was planned to develop an offensive in the general direction of Riga.

As early as February 17, the 2nd Baltic Front received the task of breaking through the German defenses southeast of Pustoshka with the forces of the 3rd Shock and 10th Guards Armies, capturing the crossings across the Velikaya River north of Idritsa, capturing the Opochka, Zilupe line, and later striking through Rezekne and Karsav, in cooperation with the troops of the left wing of the Leningrad Front, to defeat the enemy grouping in the Ostrov area. Thus, the army of Kazakov again reoriented to the Idritsa direction. The 1st shock and 22nd armies at that time had to actively tie down the opposing enemy.

In the second half of February, the Leningrad Front, with the forces of the 2nd Shock Army, expanded the bridgehead on the western bank of the Narva to 35 km along the front and up to 15 km in depth and created favorable conditions for launching an offensive on Estonian territory.

The 42nd and 67th armies, pursuing the enemy, reached Pskov from the north and east.

The 8th and 54th armies knocked out the enemy from intermediate positions along the Mshaga and Shelon rivers. After that, the first of them was withdrawn to the reserve of the front and transferred to the Narva region, and the second occupied Porkhov and went to the approaches to the Ostrov. For 15 days, the troops of the left wing of the front, overcoming the fierce resistance of the enemy on pre-prepared defensive lines, advanced 50-160 km and reached the Pskov-Ostrovsky fortified area. However, it is not possible to break through it on the move could.

The successful offensive of the Leningrad Front on the Pskov-Ostrovsky

direction created a real threat of the exit of Soviet troops to the flank and rear of the 16th Army. Therefore, the German command undertook a retreat on a wide front.

It seemed that now the most favorable conditions had come for the operations of the 2nd Baltic Front. However, the reconnaissance of the front "overslept" the enemy's retreat. Contact with him was lost. On February 18, Popov's troops occupied Staraya Russa, three days later - Hill, February 27 - Pustoshka. The belated advance behind the departing Germans prevented organizing a vigorous pursuit: the enemy withdrew systematically, withdrew his equipment, manpower and entrenched himself on a pre-prepared line east of Ostrov - Pushkinskie Gory - Idritsa. At the end of February, the troops of the front approached this line, but here, on the outskirts of the Latvian border, they were stopped by organized fire from full-profile trenches, minefields and barbed wire.

Judging by the memoirs of General of the Army Sandalov, the Soviet command had not even suspected the existence of a powerful rear line of defense in the rear of the Sever group and no longer expected serious resistance: "The German had no intention of deeply withdrawing their of the Leningrad Front, advancing on the „ command, as the troops later established. The armies Pskov and Ostrov directions, were soon forced to suspend the offensive. The armies of our front also stopped. It turned out that the enemy pulled his troops back in advance

prepared defensive line called "Panther". Elsewhere, Sandalov specifically focuses on the fact that "the latest operations of the Leningrad and 2nd Baltic fronts established important data for the Headquarters that the fascist command has no intention of withdrawing its troops to the southwest and west. It stopped its army group "North" at the previously prepared defensive line "Panther".

Despite significant progress, the troops of the Leningrad and 2nd Baltic fronts failed to fully fulfill the assigned tasks of developing the offensive in the directions of Valga, Vyru, Riga and Karsava. To break through the Narva and Pskov-Ostrov fortified regions, as well as the enemy's defensive line along the Novorzhev-Pustoshka line, according to Soviet memoirists, there were not enough forces. Only General Fedyuninsky admitted: "The main reason for the failure was not so much the resistance of the enemy as serious shortcomings in the organization of the offensive and command and control of the troops on the part of headquarters, commanders of all degrees, and above all the commander and corps commanders. Our complacency and seduction by the success of the battles before reaching the Narva River also played a significant role.

In the first days of March, the troops of both fronts entrenched themselves on the achieved lines and began preparing new operations.

Thus, the offensive operation of the Leningrad, Volkhov and 2nd Baltic fronts ended in success, which was of great military and political significance. In the course of her troops, having broken the enemy defenses at the front up to 600 km, they threw back

his

220-280 km from Leningrad, and south of Lake Ilmen moved westward up to 180 km, liberating almost the entire Leningrad and part of the Kalinin regions, again entered the land of Estonia.

The offensive of the Soviet troops in the north-western direction deprived the German command of the opportunity to use the forces of the Army Group "North" for the transfer to the south, where the Red Army dealt the main blow of the winter campaign.

However, although Army Group North suffered a heavy defeat, it was not defeated.

"The result of the First Stalinist strike was: the complete liberation of the Leningrad region and the most important railway. highway Leningrad-Moscow; crushing the entire northern strategic flank of the German armies. Soviet troops defeated the main forces of the German Army Group North; favorable conditions were created for the subsequent offensive in the Baltic states and Belarus.

#### ABOUT WHAT DID NOT HAPPEN

The above events in Soviet and Russian military history received the label: "Leningrad-Novgorod strategic offensive operation." On closer examination, at least three questions arise.

First, losses.

The latest statistical study, published under the auspices of the Russian General Staff, reports that Soviet losses in the 48 days of the operation - from January 14 to | March 1944 - amounted to 313,953 people killed and wounded, 462 tanks, 1832 guns and mortars, 260 combat aircraft. However, the losses of the 2nd Baltic Front were calculated only for the last 19 days of the operation, that is, starting from February 10 (in fact, for the period when the front lost combat

contact with the enemy, who carried out a general retreat). But, according to Army General L.M. Sandalov (and why not believe the former chief of staff of the 2nd Baltic Front?), it was in the first half of January, for example, that "the corps of the 10th Guards Army attacked especially hard, with significant losses." In mid-February, General M.M. Popov complained that "during the operation just carried out, we used up most of the ammunition and fuel, the number of personnel in the divisions decreased to three and a half and even to three thousand people (that is, almost twice). There are few serviceable tanks and cars left." From our reference books it follows: there was no offensive, there were no losses.

As a result, a strange picture emerges: the Leningrad Front, having successfully broken through the German defenses and pursuing the enemy, lost, according to official figures, 227,440 people. 2nd Baltic in fruitless bloody attacks - only 29,710 - almost ten times less.

Something prevents me from believing in this "Latin".

Secondly, isn't the scale for the First Stalinist strike too small?

Yes, of course, the Supreme wanted much more. The ultimate goal of the offensive was the complete "liberation" of Estonia and most of Latvia. In this regard, the successful actions of the two Baltic fronts were of great importance. Striking with adjacent wings at the junction of Army Groups "Center" and "North", they were supposed to isolate and, in cooperation with the troops of the Leningrad Front, destroy the K hler grouping. It is deliberately forgotten that when the 1st Baltic Front was created, the Headquarters assigned its command an unambiguous task - to develop an offensive in the Baltic. The ultimate goal of this offensive along the Western Dvina - through Vitebsk, Polotsk, Daugavpils - was to be Riga and the coast

Gulf of Riga. However, they immediately stumbled already in Vitebsk.

The operation of the front, commanded by the freshly minted General of the Army I.Kh. Bagramyan, began on December 13, 1943. The 4th shock, 11th guards, 43rd and 39th combined arms armies, 1st and 5th tank, 3rd cavalry corps took part in it. They were opposed by the 9th, 53rd, 6th army corps of the 3rd tank army of General Reinhardt - 8 infantry and airfield divisions.

The idea was to counter attacks in the direction of Bychikha station by the troops of the 4th shock and 11th guards armies to break through the German defenses on the flanks of the Gorodok ledge, surround and destroy their grouping, and then develop the strike to the south, capture Gorodok and Vitebsk. Left-flank 39th Army of General N.E. Berzarin was to strike from the southeast.

The main role was assigned to the guards of the 11th Army under the command of General K.N. Galitsky, which included 10 rifle divisions and was reinforced by the 1st tank corps. She was also given a powerful artillery group - the 21st and 15th breakthrough artillery divisions, the 8th cannon division and more than ten artillery regiments of the RGK, a guards mortar brigade and two mortar regiments. For every kilometer of the breakthrough area, there were 180 guns and mortars. Additionally, an army rocket artillery group was formed from the 2nd Guards Mortar Division and four separate regiments.

For 6-7 days it was supposed to advance 100 km, overcoming 13-15 km per day.

The fire treatment of the front edge, which began at 9 o'clock in the morning, lasted almost two hours, then the fire was transferred to the depth. The infantry and tanks followed the double barrage. The actions of aviation of the 3rd Air Army were limited due to non-flying weather. Relatively quickly managed to capture the first strip of trenches, then Bagramyan was convinced that "the real course of the offensive, if we compare it

with what is planned tends to bring a lot of surprises." The advance slowed down sharply, the German defenses had to be gnawed through at an average speed of 2-4 km per day. On the second day, tank corps were put into action. On December 16, the advanced units of both armies met in the village of Mekhovo. In the next two days, Soviet troops dismembered and almost completely destroyed the encircled German grouping, consisting of two infantry divisions and three artillery regiments.

At the same time, the forces of three armies launched an offensive in a southerly direction - to Vitebsk.

Until January 18, 1944, the troops of the 4th shock, 11th guards, 43rd and 39th armies fought hard, trying to bypass Vitebsk from the northwest and southeast - the most important defense center on the northern flank of the army group "Center" - and master it. In the course of bloody battles, the troops of the right wing of the front only managed to liberate Gorodok and cut the railway to Polotsk. Parts of Berzarin's army were occupied by Surazh.

Explaining his not entirely successful debut as a front commander, Marshal Baghramyan cites several, in his opinion, objective reasons that prevented the operation from being completed. Here are severe weather conditions, and strong enemy defenses, and a lack of fuel and ammunition, and the crafty "we did not have a significant superiority over the enemy ...".

Then the Stavka involved the Western Front in the implementation of the Vitebsk operation, transferring to it the 39th Army from the 1st Baltic. Strike Force 1st

The Baltic Front, concentrated on the adjacent flanks - the 4th shock, 11th guards and 43rd combined arms armies - was to advance in the general direction to Vitebsk from the northwest, and the Western Front of Army General V.D. Sokolovsky by the forces of the 33rd and 39th armies with the support of the 5th army - from the south-west. By joint efforts, the troops of the fronts, numbering 436,000 fighters and commanders, with the support of the 3rd and 1st air armies, were to crush the Vitebsk group and capture the city. To accomplish this task, reinforcements were concentrated, equal to almost the entire Army Group Center.

"Never before has our front had such numerous and powerful artillery as in this operation," recalls Colonel-General N.M. Khlebnikov. - In addition to regular military artillery, we had two breakthrough artillery divisions - six brigades each, a cannon division, 28 artillery and mortar regiments, a division of guards jet mortars and a number of guards mortar regiments. On the offensive front of the 11th Guards and 4th Shock Armies, in the breakthrough areas, we were able to concentrate 270 barrels per kilometer. And what trunks! More than half of the guns and mortars had a caliber over 120 mm.

The Western Front fielded 16 rifle divisions, a tank corps, 15 artillery brigades and 9 artillery regiments of the RGK.

There were so many cannons that it was difficult to place them. They were installed on firing positions not by battery, but by whole divisions.

The 6th German air fleet had 700 combat aircraft, two Soviet air armies had 1,500. The authorized strength of the three Soviet tank corps allocated to participate in the operation was 778 tanks and self-propelled guns, taking into account losses and shortages, this figure can be divided in half. But in addition to the corps, there were separate tank brigades, tank and self-propelled regiments attached to the armies.

Six Soviet armies were opposed by the same 3rd tank consisting of three army corps. For the entire Army Group Center, there were 630 tanks and self-propelled guns; General Reinhardt in the Vitebsk region, according to Soviet data, had 5 infantry divisions, 140 tanks and assault guns, up to 9 artillery regiments.

On February 3, after a powerful artillery preparation, the front was broken through by advancing formations in all directions. The infantry quickly advanced 6-7 km, but then the offensive stalled. The German command pulled together reserves to the breakthrough areas. It transferred here corps reserves, assault guns and infantry from other sectors of the fronts, one division from the reserve of the army group.

On the rivers Pestunitsa and Zaronok, on the Vitebsk defensive bypass, intense, exhausting battles ensued.

As a result of a long continuous offensive in one place, the number of Soviet rifle divisions dropped to 4-5 thousand people within a month. In the 4th shock and 11th guards armies with two tank corps attached to them, only 126 serviceable tanks remained, and in the 39th and 33rd, taking into account the tank corps, only 125. Expendable ammunition ran out without counting.

The troops of Bagramyan and Sokolovsky captured Vitebsk even deeper from the northwest and southeast, to the south of the city they cut the highway leading to Orsha, and were 4-6 km from the Vitebsk-Orsha railway. But they were not able to achieve any significant success.

On March 13, due to the loss of all tanks and 30 percent of the personnel, the offensive had to be stopped without reaching the main goal of the operation: Vitebsk remained in

opponent's hands.

The main reason for the failure was that, as of old, they decided, without further ado, to act ahead and crush the enemy with a mass of people and equipment. Again, as in the past, this whole bulky mechanism began to crumble as soon as it began to move. According to General N.M. Khlebnikova: "... weak interaction between infantry, on the one hand, tanks and artillery, on the other, poor command and control in the dynamics of battle - all this predetermined the failure of a well-conceived operation ..." Oh, how well it was conceived!

The losses of the two fronts from February 3 to March 13 - the date of the "official" end of the Vitebsk offensive operation - amounted to 135,012 people killed and wounded. But the directive of the Headquarters on the transition to the defense was given only at the beginning of May.

That's right, different scales - different terms.

In fact, the offensive actions of the fronts in the northwestern direction have not ended at all | Martha. On the contrary, from that moment began the fourth, "liberation" stage of the grandiose operation. The main attack of the Leningrad Front was planned on the Narva Isthmus in the direction of Pärnu, bypassing Tartu from the north. An auxiliary, but also quite strong blow was delivered to Pskov, from where it was supposed to develop success in the lower reaches of the Western Dvina. Part of the forces was to advance around Lake Peipsi from the south.

The command of the 2nd Baltic Front was ordered to prepare the armies of the left wing for a new offensive on Idritsa, Rezekne. Auxiliary strikes were to be prepared for Ostrov and Opochna. On the Sebezh direction, adjacent to the Idritsky direction from the south, an offensive was planned by two armies of the right wing of the 1st Baltic Front.

Another thing is that this idea completely failed.

To coordinate the operation, Marshal S.K., a representative of the Headquarters, went to the front. Timoshenko and Colonel-General S.M. Shtemenko. Timoshenko, like most illiterate bosses, did not complain about "very smart" General Staff officers, which Shtemenko was not slow to inform:

"Why were you sent with me? the marshal immediately asked and, without waiting for my answer, he continued: "Do you want to teach us old people how to keep an eye on us?" in vain

business! ... You were still walking under the table, and we were already leading divisions into battle, conquering Soviet power for you. They graduated from the academies and you think that you hold God by the beard ... How old were you when the revolution began?

I replied that by that time I was only 10 years old and, of course, I had not made any contribution to the revolution.

- That's it! - pointedly concluded the marshal.

This conversation left me bewildered."

Early morning | March Timoshenko, Shtemenko and the command of the Baltic fronts were at the front observation posts.

Due to fog and poor visibility, the start of the offensive was delayed. Around noon, after artillery preparation, Soviet troops attacked the enemy.



It did not bring the expected success. The Germans knew about the upcoming offensive and were preparing for it. Artillery and machine-gun fire from the German side was so dense that all attempts to attack were unsuccessful.

Day by day, the coming spring thaw made itself felt more and more. The soil became sour, especially on the plains. Water flooded lowlands and ravines. The attacking infantry barely moved through the solid mud. The wheels of guns and cars were sucked hard into the broken ruts of the roads. Even tanks got stuck in ditches and rivers, sometimes stopping in front of the very enemy positions. Cars, and even horse carts, could move only at night, when the soil froze, and during the day they got helplessly bogged down in the mud.

With the permission of the Headquarters, Timoshenko instructed to postpone the offensive to March 6.

The main blow with the forces of four rifle corps in the direction of Opochka was to be delivered by the 10th Guards Army, for which it was again transferred to the left flank. By the end of March 3, General Kazakov's troops, having transferred their combat sector on the Pustoshka-Mironov front to the 3rd shock, concentrated in the region of lakes Losno and Berezno.

On the morning of March 6, the 7th and 19th Guards Rifle Corps attacked the enemy, but since his firepower, hidden in the folds of rugged terrain, in

period of artillery preparation survived, then during the day 'it was possible to capture only individual strongholds on the front line of defense. In the next two days, units of the 19th Rifle Corps advanced 1.5-2 km.

On March 12, the army commander brought the 15th Guards Rifle Corps into battle, but the enemy, pulling reserves to the breakthrough site (in particular, the 12th Panzer Division), fiercely resisted.

As a result of seven days of fighting, army formations advanced in a northwestern direction by only 4-5 km. On March 17, the front commander ordered the transition of the 10th Guards Army to the defense.

On the Narva direction, the troops of the Leningrad Front failed to advance a single step.

On March 9, General Govorov, concentrating efforts on his left wing, launched an offensive with the forces of the 42nd, 54th and 67th armies - 173,120 officers and soldiers - with the aim of capturing Pskov. On the very first day, the most difficult battles unfolded here, which did not stop until mid-April. Soviet troops broke through the heavily fortified defenses south of the city, advanced up to 13 km, cut the highway and railway going from Pskov to Ostrov. More could not be done, the losses of the front amounted to over 42,000 killed and wounded.

At that time, on the northern side of the Opochets ledge, troops of the 1st Shock Army of the 2nd Baltic Front suddenly crossed the Velikaya River on ice 12 km northwest of Pushkinskiye Gory and captured a bridgehead on the other bank, which had about 12 km along the front and up to 7 km in depth. Failed to develop success. German forces 13th

the airfield and 30th infantry divisions held the line of dominating heights, blocking the exit from the bridgehead in a southwestern direction.

The front headquarters began planning a new operation, starting from this "patch".

The 10th Guards Army was ordered to surrender its combat sector to the troops of the 3rd Shock Troops and make a march-maneuver to the bridgehead on the Velikaya River. Together with it, the rifle corps of Lieutenant General N.D. was transferred from the 3rd shock army. Zakhvataev to reinforce the 1st shock army, and at the same time General N.E. Chibisov - for the same purpose. The 140-kilometer route passed along the front line, approaching it in other places by 3-5 km. The troops of the army moved at night, but, despite the camouflage measures taken, it was

impossible.

Coming out of the forests northeast of Lake Losno on the night of March 28, by dawn on April 3, the army concentrated in the area of Rusaki station - the village of Kryukovo. Due to the continued warming, the roads were in such a state that it was possible to deliver shells to firing positions only by hand. The ice on the Velikaya River loosened, the crossing to the bridgehead was carried out only along two hastily built bridges, which were destroyed by enemy artillery fire every now and then. The flood was coming. There was a week and a half left before the thaw. This time was ordered to be used for the offensive.

The enemy position, which closed the bridgehead from the southwest, consisted of a number of strongholds, equipped on the heights. The dominant heights in the Pushkinskiye Gory area allowed German observers to see every point of the terrain on the bridgehead, to view not only the battle formations of the advanced Soviet units, but also the second echelons and even the rear in places for 20-30 km. "Piglet" was shot from three sides by the fire of 32 enemy artillery batteries. In the area of Pushkinskiye Gory, the Germans had a large artillery group. In general, Kazakov and Chibisov did not evoke enthusiasm for the starting line, but General Popov resolutely dismissed all objections.

The operational formation of the 10th Guards Army consisted of two echelons: in the first - the 7th and 15th Guards Corps, in the second - the 19th Guards Rifle Corps. The battle formations of the corps were also built in two echelons. Four rifle divisions deployed directly on the bridgehead. The neighbor on the right - the 1st Shock Army - had two divisions in the first echelon in the same bridgehead. All divisions of the first echelon also built deep battle formations. For example, the 7th Guards, which occupied only 1200 meters along the front, had, in essence, three echelons. In the 30th Guards, with the same strip width, there were only two battalions in the first echelon, and in the back of their heads

"breathed" four more. For each division of the first echelon, 10-15 tanks were allocated to accompany the infantry. Of the artillery assets, only direct-fire guns and mortar batteries could be placed on the bridgehead. The main artillery grouping remained on the northeastern bank of the Great.

During the preparation of the operation, the Germans behaved rather passively. Without much opposition on their part, the Soviet troops reached the bridgehead and took their starting position for the attack. However, on the morning of April 7, as soon as the artillery preparation began, the enemy opened a devastating fire on the "patch" filled with troops. The divisions of the first echelon immediately suffered such significant losses that some units had to be replaced even at the starting line. Nevertheless, two armies, supported by army artillery and aviation of the 15th Air Army, went on the offensive to the south with the immediate task of striking in the direction of the village of Zhdany to cut the Ostrov OPOCHKA highway.

However, artillery fire could not reliably suppress either the enemy's infantry fire system or its artillery and mortar batteries. Despite the support of the attack by a regiment of attack aircraft, rifle formations captured only certain sections of the first line. And only the regiments of the 30th Guards Division by the end

days advanced 4 km and captured the village of Kalinkino. True, this "success" cost the division such losses that it had to be withdrawn to the reserve at night.

During the battle, it turned out that the enemy, during the march of the 10th Guards Army, managed to pull up units of the 23rd, 69th, 83rd Infantry and 12th Tank Divisions along a shorter road route - the Pustoshka-Ostrov highway to the bridgehead, then

There is

the same troops that opposed the army during its offensive north of Pustoshka.

On April 8, Soviet artillerymen with great difficulty accumulated ammunition at the firing positions of the batteries. In the following days, from 9 to 16 April, rifle divisions repeatedly attacked the enemy, but to no avail. The troops accumulated on the bridgehead were subjected to frequent air strikes and almost continuous enemy artillery raids. Attempts to develop success continued for another week, but did not give significant results.

In the meantime, spring was gaining strength, the roads were impassable, spring floods were supposed to begin from day to day. Now even a successful breakthrough, if it had taken place, could not have been further developed.

On April 20, an order was issued to stop offensive operations and to withdraw the 10th Guards Army to the front reserve.

Thus, for another two spring months, Soviet troops unsuccessfully tried to break through the Panther line. These bloody battles, which were fought over a wide area by 12 Soviet armies, were not even awarded the title of independent front-line operations. General of the Army M.I. Kazakov left the saddest memories of this period: "I don't know about others, but I was very annoyed then that the operations followed one after another, were prepared hastily

And

looked more like separate jerks, and not like strictly thought-out operational measures connected one with the other. As a result, instead of reaching the enemy's communications, the troops of the front made only shallow dents in his defenses.

The main result of the fourth stage of the First Stalinist strike was that the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command in practice was finally convinced "that the fascist command has no intention of withdrawing its troops" and that "the enemy, who occupied a powerful system of defensive structures, resisted skillfully and with great stubbornness."

Of course, Stalin expected more.

Therefore, not only victorious salutes took place, but also a "debriefing". The Supreme Commander dismissed from their positions most of the top commanders of the most "guilty" - the Baltic fronts.

As early as January 21, General M.I. Kazakov replaced A.V. Sukhomlin as commander of the 10th Guards. Alexander Vasilyevich was appointed deputy head of the Frunze Military Academy. His career ended there, until his retirement, he was promoted to lieutenant general.

General G.N. Korotkov was castigated from the post of commander of the 1st shock army to the post of commander-22.

Colonel General N.E. In April, Chibisov was transferred from the 3rd Shock Army to command the 1st Shock Army, but was kept there for only one month. In June 1944

Nikandr Evlampievich ended up in the chair of the head of the same Frunze Academy. Until the end of the war, his military knowledge and experience remained unclaimed. Yes and

to tell the truth, the general was not "Zhukov's sourdough". According to the memoirs of colleagues, the former staff captain of the tsarist army, Chibisov, possessed qualities rare among the "kraskoms": "Calm and balanced, with extensive experience in practical work in the troops, he never raised his voice in conversation with his subordinates ... I remember how coolly he listened to over the phone, even the most unpleasant reports of division commanders, gave short practical instructions. He never threatened anyone with removal from office.

On the other hand, who replaced Chibisov as commander of the 3rd shock general V.A. Yushkevich, whom Stalin gave a chance to improve, "was distinguished ... by a noble appearance and emphasized severity. I would even say - harshness in dealing with people. At headquarters they were afraid of him ... I had to listen to several comments on the work of the department. Trifling in essence, they were stated in a rough form.

The commander of the 4th shock general V.I. was sent to the reserve of the Headquarters. Shvetsov and Commander-43 General K.D. Golubev.

Markian Mikhailovich Popov was demoted in April and no longer commanded fronts.

In the yoke, we again return to the first question: what are the true dimensions of our losses? It is only known that in the month and a half of the assault on Pskov, the troops of the three armies of the Leningrad Front lost over 42,000 people. In the Vitebsk operation of the 1st Baltic - more than 135,000. Moreover, March 13 is called the official end date of the Vitebsk operation, however, according to the directive of the Headquarters, the 1st Baltic Front went on the defensive only at the beginning of May.

And how many died during the first assault on Vitebsk, which was turned from a strategic strike into the Gorodok operation? With a breakthrough to Novosokolniki? On the Panther line? During the attacks on Idritsa? Yes, it turns out there were no attacks! For example, the chronicle of the combat route of the 3rd Shock Army states that in the period March 1-July 9, its troops were engaged in "defense at the line of Balabnino, Simonovo, Pustoshka, Denisovo." The attack on Vitebsk by all the armies of their front, as presented by Bagramyan, fit in two sentences: "Throughout the winter of 1944, the troops of the 1st Baltic Front continuously attacked the enemy. In the end, their offensive capabilities dried up.

Passing off what has been achieved as desired, the marshal proudly asserts: "The goal of the operation was basically achieved, the Gorodok ledge was eliminated." In short, we got what we wanted. And we didn't need the village of Gadyukino or the city of Vitebsk at all.

DISCONTINUES ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The biggest thunderstorm broke out over the heads of the command of the Western Front. It actually failed what, logically, should have become Stalin's Second Strike.

Before General V.D. Sokolovsky and his five armies at the end of September 1943 were tasked with defeating Army Group Center in the Smolensk-Minsk direction, freeing Orsha, Mogilev, Vilnius. The Belorussian Front, General of the Army K.K. Rokossovsky, advancing south, was supposed to capture Minsk.

The troops of the two generals were of approximately the same quality, the ratio of forces with the enemy, the conditions of the terrain were the same. It's just that the results are different. Rokossovsky, from November 1943 to March 1944, carried out three front-line operations, advanced up to 200 km, liberated the cities of Gomel, Rechitsa, Mozyr, Kalinkovichi, Rogachev, losing about 200,000 fighters.

By April 1, 1944, the troops of the Western Front carried out 11 operations in three directions and covered from 10 to 20 km. The losses of the Western Front in killed and wounded amounted to 530,537 people. After the first unsuccessful attempts, on January 18, the Headquarters demanded that Sokolovsky take at least Vitebsk and Orsha, but even this turned out to be an impossible task for him. Zhukov dragged Sokolovsky along with him throughout the war, and the command of the Western Front is the only case when Vasily Danilovich, a thoroughbred office worker, was released on independent bread. However, it was not possible to make a career as a commander: Sokolovsky himself was not very talented in military art with ambitions, he gathered the same personnel around him, replacing the lack of intelligence with high demands.

Instead of coordinated strikes to achieve a specific goal, the front carried out army operations isolated from each other. Moreover, their army headquarters planned, but the headquarters of the front did not see these plans in the eye, the commander approved them by phone. Few saw the commander himself. For four months, Sokolovsky lived alone with his "adjutant" in the ranks of colonel, 100 kilometers from his own headquarters. During this time, he saw the chief of staff of the front no more than 3-4 times, the commanders of the military branches made an appointment with him a few days in advance.

In fact, Sokolovsky and his headquarters did not lead the troops, but were only engaged in transmitting Moscow directives to lower authorities. Then it was only necessary to regularly pound the table with his fist, threaten subordinates with execution and demand that the task be completed at any cost.

The fish rots from the head: subordinates treated their duties accordingly. They did not give a damn about the correct organization of the battle, about the lives of the soldiers. Enemy reconnaissance was not carried out. A huge mass of artillery thrashed at their own, it happened even with direct fire (!), In the best case, at an empty place. The authorities were not interested in where the guns were firing, as long as they opened fire on schedule. The infantry went on the attack on the unsuppressed firing points, suffered colossal losses and did not move forward. At the same time, shells were used up almost twice as much as on the 1st Ukrainian Front fighting for Kyiv. In massive and unsupported attacks, the 2nd Guards Tatsinsky Tank Corps was completely destroyed: 2 (two !!!) tanks remained in it.

Sokolovsky considered General V.N. to be his best commander. Gordov, who commanded the 33rd Army. Vasily Nikolaevich was demoted to this position from the post of commander of the Stalingrad Front, which was very insulting to him. The general was a man of a completely Zhukovsky warehouse, that is, a boor, a massacre, a shooter and, in general, a "hot man." But why does Stalin need two Zhukovs? Then you won't save any troops at all. As at Stalingrad, Gordov's main method of controlling the battle was swearing, insults, and the threat of execution. The losses of the 33rd Army in five months amounted to over 50 percent of the losses of the entire Western Front; Gordov destroyed his army at least twice, and there is nothing to blame on the Germans: the arriving reinforcements immediately rushed into battle, the unit commanders did not know their soldiers, and the soldiers of their commanders. He drove scouts, chemists, sappers under machine guns, put the officers of divisions and corps in a chain. From the commander's orders:

"Place the entire officer corps in battle formations and pass the forest in a chain,

appointing small detachments to smoke submachine gunners out of their nest ...

Immediately send all control of the body to the circuit. Leave only the head of the operations department at the headquarters ...

It is better for us to be killed today than not to complete the task ... "

Under the command of Gordov, 4 division commanders, 8 deputy division commanders and their chiefs of staff, 38 regiment commanders and

their deputies and 174 battalion commanders. Not counting the officers who were shot without trial or investigation.

In principle, in the Red Army, all these were normal phenomena. It is not for nothing that a soldier's proverb says: "In war, as in a collective farm, everything is unfair." If Sokolovsky and Gordov had taken at least Orsha, they would have received orders and new replenishment. But here the case was painfully clinical: half a million losses and no result. Therefore, in order to find out the reasons for the failures, the Headquarters in April 1944 sent a special commission to the Western Front, consisting of GKO member G.M. Malenkov, Colonel General A.S. Shcherbakov and S.M. Shtemenko, lieutenant general F.F. Kuznetsova and A.I. Shmonaeva with several groups of inspectors for all types of troops and services, who came to the conclusion that the main reason for the lack of success in the operations of the Western Front was "unsatisfactory leadership of the troops on the part of the command."

The report of the commission to Comrade Stalin dated April 11, 1944, reveals a striking picture of the disintegration of the "tops" and the ruthless destruction of the "bottoms":

"In none of the listed operations, the enemy's defense was broken through, at least to its tactical depth, the operation ended, at best, with a slight penetration into the enemy's defense with heavy losses of our troops ...: The Western Front, during all operations, always had a significant superiority in forces and means in front of the enemy, allowing you to unconditionally count on success ...

In the 33rd, 31st and 5th armies there were repeated cases when artillery fired on areas (squares) given by the army artillery headquarters, but in fact there were no targets in these squares and the artillery fired on an empty place, and our infantry was shot enemy firing points from other areas ... at the observation posts of some artillery regiments there were not officers, but ordinary soldiers ...

Artillerymen do not reveal their mistakes and shortcomings, do not study them, but try to cover them up. Artillery preparation is carried out according to the template. The beginning of artillery preparation was marked by a volley of RS, then a period of destruction was carried out, and at the end - an artillery raid along the front edge. The enemy got used to this pattern and, knowing the order of fire, skillfully kept his manpower in shelters ... Excessive centralization of artillery during the advancement of infantry in the hands of division commanders and above deprives the battalion commander of means of suppression and the ability to react to the situation. Mortarmen are especially poorly educated, in some cases they simply evade communication with the infantry, linger in the rear, as a result of which the mortars hit anywhere ... Direct-fire guns, despite their abundance in infantry combat formations, are used poorly and ineptly. The subordination of these guns is not defined, they often do not have specific goals ... Self-propelled guns are used ineptly and do not give the desired effect ... The fire of counter-battery groups is ineffective due to poor knowledge of targets and lack of adjustment. Long-range artillery is accustomed to firing at squares, it shoots badly at the signs of a gap, and does not know how to transfer fire quickly and accurately. Counter-mortar groups cannot suppress enemy mortar groups, they shoot poorly and

unsharply. Control over the execution of fire missions is almost not carried out ... This situation gives rise to irresponsibility among the artillery officers.

In this way, the front threw 17,661 wagons of ammunition into the air.

"The regrouping of troops and preparation for operations was carried out without proper secrecy and disinformation of the enemy, as a result of which surprise was lost in almost all operations and operations proceeded in conditions of readiness of the enemy to meet our offensive, although formally the front was not published and everything was supposedly kept in the strictest secrecy ...

Military intelligence is not organized, it is carried out without a plan. Intelligence

operations are prepared and carried out poorly ... in December, in the 192nd rifle division, 23 reconnaissance operations were carried out in order to capture the "language". Not a single prisoner was captured in these operations, and the losses of our reconnaissance groups amounted to 26 people killed and wounded. In the 192nd, 247th and 174th Rifle Divisions from January 1 to February 15, hundreds of search reconnaissance operations were carried out and not a single prisoner was captured. In 33G and 251st Rifle Division, scouts were repeatedly blown up in their minefields, since they were not told their location ... In the 33rd Army, all reconnaissance units of formations and units participated in the offensive as line units and were almost completely destroyed ... Equipment agents sent behind enemy lines was often standard and made it easy to reveal our agent. Agents were sent to the territory occupied by the Germans in 1941 in clothes with a note about their production by Moskvoshvey in 1942 and 1943 ... Many agents stopped sending reports solely because there was no power for radio stations ...

Instead of careful preparation of the operation and organization of the battle, instead of the correct use of artillery, Gordoye sought to break through the enemy defenses with manpower. This is evidenced by the losses suffered by the army... On March 6, by order of Gordov, Major Trofimov was shot without trial or investigation, allegedly for evading battle. In fact, as established by the investigation, Major Trofimov was not to blame ... According to a number of commanders who worked with Gordov, the inhuman attitude towards people, sheer hysteria tormented them so much that there were cases when commanders could not command their formations and units. The front command passed by these outrages and continued to consider him the best army commander ...

Instead of studying shortcomings and eliminating them, the command of the Western Front, instead of studying shortcomings and eliminating them, showed complacency, arrogance, did not reveal shortcomings, did not take into account mistakes, did not teach people ... The command of the front does not tolerate criticism, it meets with hostility attempts to criticize shortcomings ... his closest assistants - the commanders of the armed forces and the heads of services, for many days does not receive them and does not resolve issues. Some deputy commanders did not know about the tasks of their branches of service in connection with the ongoing operations, not to mention the fact that they were not involved in the development of operations ...

From October 1943 to April 1944, the Western Front, despite the superiority in forces over the enemy and the high consumption of ammunition, did not move forward. All the operations carried out during these six months, through the fault of the front command, failed. The Western Front did not fulfill the tasks assigned to it by the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, and was weakened as a result of heavy losses in people and equipment, which were the result of the inept leadership of the front command.

By the way, the Western Front was closest to Moscow, but, fortunately, Hitler had other concerns. By order of the Stavka, as those who failed to cope with their duties, the commander of the front, General Sokolovsky, was removed from his post,

the head of the artillery of the front, General Camera, the head of the intelligence department, Colonel Ilnitsky. A member of the Military Council, Bulganin, was reprimanded for "failure to report" about outrages. It is quite clear that the generals were punished not for mediocre leadership, not

for senseless losses and tens of thousands of funerals, not for extrajudicial executions, but for failure to comply with the order of Comrade Stalin. It would be naive to believe that they were put on trial, although the prison wept for them. After all, they tried, especially the "best army commander" Gordov. Beat subordinates? - was very demanding. Shot? - Provided strong leadership. (And the family of the innocently murdered Major Trofimov was hunchbacked in the rear: everything for the front, everything for the Victory. And if it weren't for the high commission, they would have been "members of the family of the traitor to the Motherland.")

Therefore, Gordov was given a very stern warning and was given another

army - 3rd shock! It is doubtful that he became better at fighting, except that he "tried" even more. Already after the war, being the commander of the district, General Gordov committed a much more terrible crime: he harbored a grudge against Comrade Stalin, which he did not hide in conversations with comrades in arms. And he was terribly punished: in the fall of 1946, the 50-year-old nomenklatura was made a simple Soviet pensioner. Having poked around on social security, standing in lines, having lost adjutants and the services of special distributors, the retired colonel general felt homesick, preoccupied with the fate of the people and began to criticize the existing order. But the main thing that tormented him and did not let him sleep at night was recorded by the sensitive microphones of the MGB: "Do you know what turns me over? The fact that I have ceased to be a lord..." In 1947 he was arrested and three years later he was sentenced to death.

General Sokolovsky, at the request of Zhukov, who did not leave an old friend in trouble, was appointed chief of staff of the 1st Ukrainian Front. In the future, Vasily Danilovich fought under the wing of Georgy Konstantinovich all the way to Berlin and was even awarded the Hero's star "for the skillful leadership of the military operations of the troops in the Berlin operation, personal courage and courage."

On April 24, by order of the Headquarters, the 2nd and 3rd Belorussian were created on the site of the Western Front.

Thus, the first strikes in Belarus failed. Naturally, they could not be either Stalinist or crushing.

## SECOND STALIN IMPACT

"... the troops of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts inflicted in February-March on the southern wing of the German front. The strategic goal of the second Stalinist strike was the defeat of the German army groups "South" and "A" and the liberation of Right-Bank Ukraine. The first task of the fronts was to destroy the Korsun-Shevchenko, Krivoy Rog-Nikopol and Rovno-Lutsk enemy groups. The fulfillment of these three tasks was the content of the first stage of Stalin's second strike.

By the end of 1943, the largest forces of the opposing sides were concentrated in Ukraine. The Germans had here up to 40 percent of the infantry and about 70 percent of the tank and motorized divisions operating on the entire Soviet German front. The grouping of the Red Army was even more significant: it included about 42 percent of rifle and up to 80 percent of tank and



mechanized formations, which made it possible to launch a new powerful offensive without significant regroupings.

Therefore, it was in Ukraine that Stalin decided to strike the main blow of the winter-spring campaign, during which it was planned to defeat the entire southern wing of the enemy, complete the liberation of the Right Bank, reach the state border of the USSR and create conditions for the development of an offensive in Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Balkans. In fact, these are ten strikes, ten operations, huge tank masses, the best Stalinist commanders.

From the end of December 1943 to mid-April 1944, one of the largest battles of World War II unfolded in the vast expanses from Polesie to the Black Sea, from the Dnieper to the Carpathians. About 4 million people, 45,500 guns and mortars, 4,200 tanks, self-propelled and assault guns, over 4,000 aircraft took part in it simultaneously from both sides.

The German command, realizing well what serious military

political and economic complications would entail the loss of the richest industrial and food regions of the Right-Bank Ukraine and the withdrawal of Soviet armies to the approaches to the Balkans, required the troops to hold their positions on the southern wing of the strategic front at any cost. In an effort to restore the defense along the Dnieper and release the Crimean grouping, Hitler repeatedly emphasized that if it was impossible to hold the front in the East, as a last resort, the question of retreat could only be discussed on its northern flank, but not on the southern one.

Such a formulation of the question, when not operational, but political and military-economic considerations became a priority, greatly complicated the life of the German commanders in the army in the field. The process, which in the fall of 1942 General Halder called "darning holes", progressed.

The Fuhrer wanted to keep everything: Crimea with its ports and airfields, Donbass coal and Kuban bread, Nikopol manganese and Krivoy Rog ore.

"As was often the case," recalls Manstein, "Hitler this time also believed that his will would be stronger than the facts."

By the end of 1943, the German troops operating in Ukraine - Army Groups "South" and "A", were thrown back to the line Ovruch, Radomyshl, Kanev, Bashtina, Marganets, Kachkarovka.

Army Group "South" - the 1st and 4th tank, 8th field armies - under the command of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, defended on the front south of Ovruch - Kachkarovka on the Dnieper. She held a small section of the right bank of the river in the Kanev area, as well as a bridgehead 30 km deep and 120 km wide on its left bank near Nikopol.

Army Group "A" as part of the 6th German and 3rd Romanian armies under the command of Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist occupied the defense south along the lower reaches of the Dnieper, further along the Black Sea coast to the Dniester estuary.

In the Iasi region, the 4th Romanian army was in reserve. The 17th German Army was cut off in the Crimea.

Air support was provided by the 4th Air Fleet (1st, 4th and 8th Aviation Corps), as well as the main part of the Romanian Air Force.

By the beginning of the battle for the Right Bank, Army Groups "South" and "A" (without the 17th Army) consisted of 91 divisions, including 18 tank and 4 motorized, 2 motorized brigades, 5 separate tank battalions, 19 divisions of assault guns.

This grouping, according to "classic" Soviet sources, had 1,760,000 men, 2,200 tanks and assault guns, 16,800 guns and mortars, and 1,460 combat aircraft.

The German command intended not only to hold the occupied lines, but also to try to eliminate the Soviet bridgeheads on the right bank of the Dnieper, as well as to establish contact with their Crimean grouping from the Nikopol bridgehead to the south and from the Crimea to the north.

The Germans were hastily building defensive structures. However, by the end of December, they were able to equip only the main defense line 4-6 km deep on a large part of the front. On the most important directions, 10-15 km from the front line, a second line was being prepared. In the operational depth along the banks of the Goryn, Southern Bug, Ingulets, Dniester, Prut rivers, rear lines were equipped. A powerful defense was created in the Crimea: in the Perekop region and on the Kerch Peninsula.

From the Soviet side, south of the Pripyat River, troops of four fronts operated. 1st Ukrainian Front - Commander General of the Army N.F. Vatutin, - reflecting

enemy offensive in the Kiev direction, held a vast bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnieper west of Kyiv.

2nd Ukrainian Front General of the Army I.S. Konev and the 3rd Ukrainian General of the Army R.Ya. Malinovsky occupied the second major bridgehead - from Cherkasy to Zaporozhye.

4th Ukrainian Front under the command of General of the Army F.I. Tolbukhin, the main forces covered the Nikopol bridgehead of the enemy, part of the troops was fixed on a wide front along the left bank of the lower reaches of the Dnieper, and the 51st army blocked the 17th German army in the Crimea. On the bridgehead captured on the Kerch Peninsula, the Separate Primorsky Army of General I.E. fought. Petrov.

According to the plan of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, these forces were to defeat the Army Groups "South" and "A", liberate the Right-Bank Ukraine and the Crimea. The troops of the four fronts were to dismember the enemy grouping with powerful blows in a number of directions and destroy it piece by piece. At first, it was planned to defeat the enemy in the eastern regions of the Right Bank, finally throwing him back from the Dnieper, and occupy the line of the Southern Bug (to Pervomaisky) - the Ingulets River (from Krivoy Rog to the mouth), and subsequently, developing the offensive, reach the line Lutsk - Mogilev - Podolsky - Dniester, at the same time liquidate the Crimean group.

The 1st Ukrainian Front, inflicting the main blow on Vinnitsa, Mogilev-Podolsky and part of the forces on Lutsk and Khristianovka, and the 2nd Ukrainian Front, inflicting the main blow on Kirovograd, Pervomaisk and part of the forces on Khristianovka, were to defeat the main forces of the army group "South" and exit to the Carpathians to split the enemy's strategic front.

The troops of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts, with strikes in converging directions on Nikopol, Novo-Vorontsovka, were to defeat the Nikopol-Krivoy Rog grouping of the enemy, develop a strike on Nikolaev, Odessa and liberate the entire Black Sea

coast. At the same time, the 4th Ukrainian Front, only at the initial stage of the operation, was involved in joint operations with Malinovsky's troops to defeat the enemy in the Nikopol area; subsequently, the front switched to defeating the enemy in the Crimea together with the Separate Primorsky Army.

In addition to the air armies of the fronts (2nd, 5th, 17th and 8th), long-range aviation was supposed to participate in the offensive, which was tasked with attacking railway facilities, ports and enemy ships, as well as airfields and troops located in its deep rear.

To cover its communications, water crossings and other important facilities in the front line, in addition to the front-line air defense forces, the Headquarters also attracted large forces of the country's air defense forces. Four corps areas, two fighter aviation corps and two divisional areas of the Western Air Defense Front, commanded by General M.S. Hulk. To cover the threatened objects in the south, they had over 2,000 anti-aircraft guns, 1,650 anti-aircraft machine guns, and about 450 fighters.

The final result of the winter-spring campaign in the south was to be the exit to the state border line from Izmail to Brest.

The actions of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts were coordinated by the representative of the Headquarters, Marshal G.K. Zhukov. Marshal A.M. was appointed coordinator of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts. Vasilevsky.

One gets the impression that the Supreme Commander-in-Chief has nothing more to do with either his deputy or the chief of the General Staff. Both were also the only deputies of the People's Commissar of Defense. The very listing of positions implies that senior officers of this rank should, especially in such

crucial moments, to be at the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command, at the helm of control of all the Armed Forces, where the main decisions on the actions of the troops were developed and made, and not to break away from their direct duties by visiting the troops.

But the Supreme Commander had his own opinion on this matter, he preferred to be "at the helm" on his own. According to the memoirs of Vasilevsky: "I.V. Stalin did not like it when we "sat up" in the capital. He believed that there were enough people to manage the daily work in the General Staff and the People's Commissariat of Defense. And the place of his deputies and the chief of the General Staff is in the troops, so that there, right on the spot, implement the plans of the Headquarters, coordinate the combat work of the fronts and help them. Cost me or G.K. Zhukov to stay in Moscow for a while, as he asked:

- Where are you going now? - and added: - Choose for yourself which front you will go to. "Sometimes he immediately gave appropriate instructions."

The point is not only in these two marshals, although their case is the most clinical, but in the very institute of representatives of the Headquarters. This burp of the Soviet management system has survived to this day: as soon as something important happens somewhere, a bunch of big bosses who interfere with everything are immediately run into with the goal of "supervising and reporting", while not bearing any responsibility for what is happening.

As Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky, back in the spring of 1943, commanding the Central Front, he sent a note addressed to Stalin: "Attention was also drawn to the somewhat incomprehensible situation in command and control, when the chief of the General Staff, instead of being in the center, where all command of the armed forces is concentrated, decreases to one of the sections of the front, thereby turning off control. First Deputy Supreme Commander

also leaves for some sector, and it often turned out that at the most tense moments at the front in Moscow there was only one Supreme Commander-in-Chief. In this case, it turned out "distributive" control of the troops.

I believed that the control of the fronts should be carried out from the center - by the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command and the General Staff. They also coordinate the actions of the fronts, for which the General Staff exists. Already the first months of the war showed the futility of the created improvised operational command bodies of the "directions" that united the management of several fronts. These "directions" were quite rightly eliminated. Why, then, did the Headquarters again begin to use the same thing, but under a different name - the representative of the Headquarters for coordinating the actions of the two fronts? Such a representative, being with the commander of the front, most often intervening in the actions of the commander, replaced him. At the same time, he did not bear any responsibility for the state of affairs, which was completely assigned to the front commander, who often received conflicting orders on the same issue: one thing from the Headquarters, and another from its representative. The latter, being in the capacity of coordinator at one of the fronts, naturally showed a great interest in bringing as many forces and means as possible to where he himself was. This was most often done to the detriment of other fronts, which had to carry out no less complex operations.

In addition, the mere presence of a representative of the Headquarters, especially the Deputy Supreme Commander, at the front commander limited the initiative, tied the front, as they say, hand and foot. At the same time, there was a reason to think about some distrust of the front commander on the part of the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command.

For example, the commander of the Don Front, Rokossovsky, arrives at the command post of the commander of the Southwestern Front, Vatutin, to coordinate issues of interaction, and there - the chief of the General Staff Vasilevsky: "The behavior of both seemed strange to me. The impression was that Vasilevsky was in the role of front commander, who decided a number of serious

issues related to the forthcoming actions of the troops of this front, often without consulting the commander. Vatutin, in fact, did not even play the role of chief of staff: he went to the telegraph office, negotiated by telegraph and telephone, collected reports, and reported them to Vasilevsky. All those issues that I intended to discuss with Vatutin had to be discussed with Vasilevsky.

What, then, was "actually" the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, according to reviews, "a very impressionable person" Vatutin, when he had at his headquarters not Vasilevsky, who was considered an overly mild boss, but the unbridled, despotic Zhukov? Did you sharpen his pencils?

Although on all fronts there were special directions in the ranks of generals, whose duties included comprehensive and timely informing the General Staff about the actions of the troops, although the headquarters themselves, as well as political workers, special officers and other, other, the main duty of the representative of the Stavka was to compose daily reports . It was sacred

"Marshal Vasilevsky. It is already 3:30 am on August 17, and you have not yet deigned to send to Headquarters reports on the results of the operation for August 16 and on your assessment of the situation ... For the last time I warn you that in case you allow you to forget about your debt to the Headquarters, you will be removed from the post of Chief of the General Staff (!) and will be recalled from the front ...

I. Stalin.

"That telegram shocked me," Vasilevsky recalls. True, Alexander Mikhailovich was shocked not by the fact that the chief of the General Staff should write reports to the General Staff instead of receiving them, but by the very fact of the highest reprimand, for the first time in his hitherto impeccable career. Then Vasilevsky calmed down and agreed that without discipline in the army - nowhere.

From the moment of his appointment to the post in June 1942, Vasilevsky did nothing but coordinate the actions of different fronts. And since the spring of 1943, he almost completely stopped appearing in the General Staff, which he allegedly led. That is, he did not fulfill his direct official duties. He himself admitted this when he wrote a submission to General A.I. Antonov: "Army General Antonov A.I., being the first deputy head. The General Staff, in fact, from the spring of 1943 bears the brunt of the work of the beginning. of the General Staff at the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command and copes with it completely.

From mid-June 1943 to January 1944, Zhukov was in Moscow only four times, spending a total of two weeks at Headquarters. The same can be said about the Chief of the Operational Directorate of the General Staff, General S.M. Shtemenko.

We already know the opinion of Rokossovsky. More examples from his memoirs:

"... for me, the role of the deputies of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief G.K. Zhukov and A.M. Vasilevsky, and even more so G.M. Malenkov near Stalingrad ... The stay of the Chief of the General Staff near Stalingrad and his role in those events related to the events taking place there are puzzling.

The representative of the Stavka Zhukov on the Kursk Bulge: "Zhukov G.K. first came to us at the command post in Svoboda on July 4, on the eve of the battle. He stayed with us until 10-11 o'clock on July 5 and allegedly departed for the Western Front to V.D. Sokolovsky, so, at least, when leaving, he told us ... we have never been on the Central Front ... Whether there was a representative of the Headquarters here or not - nothing has changed from this. And maybe even worse ... "

Another "representative" - L.3. Mekhlis in the spring of 1942 greatly "helped" the command of the Crimean Front. As a result: the death of three armies, the fall of Sevastopol, almost 250 thousand prisoners.

"Coordinating the work of the fronts," in September 1943, Zhukov dropped two

airborne brigades to the Bukrinsky bridgehead directly into the location of the German tank divisions. During the Korsun operation, "Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov failed to organize a sufficiently clear interaction between the troops that repelled the onslaught of the enemy, and was recalled by the Headquarters to Moscow."

In October 1943, two "watchers" of the North Caucasian Front at once approved the plan for an adventurous raid by a detachment of ships on Yalta. As a result, the last three combat-ready destroyers of the Black Sea Fleet were killed.

In January 1944, Marshal K.E. Voroshilov, "implementing the plans of the Headquarters", organized the landing of amphibious assault forces through the Kerch Strait. The landing party was killed almost completely. With a demotion in military rank, the commander of the Separate Primorsky Army, General I.A., left his post. Petrov. At the audience, the Supreme Commander explained to him: "We will not allow you to hide behind the broad back of Comrade Voroshilov. You were the commander there and you will bear everything

you are responsible."

And so the marshals dangled along the fronts, doing, to put it mildly, not their own business:

they crawled on their belly along the front line, bringing to a heart attack the commanders and authorized officers, who were responsible for their precious lives with their heads, and were very proud of it, instructed the division commanders, talked with the "people", knocked out reinforcements and equipment for "their" fronts, supervised and drove.

Only in the Red Army could the chief of the General Staff, driving around German positions, blow up a mine and at the same time consider that he was in his place: "This form of command and control through representatives of the Stavka, who were directly in the combat zone, justified itself." Vasilevsky did not understand why these Prussians invented the General Staff!

The preparation of the Soviet offensive took place in difficult conditions, when the troops fought almost uninterrupted battles for the Dnieper bridgeheads, and the main forces of the 1st Ukrainian Front repelled the attack of the 4th Panzer Army on Kiev. The actions of this front in the upcoming operation were to begin with a counteroffensive against the strongest enemy grouping. To accomplish the task, in mid-November, the Headquarters transferred the 1st Guards Army, and then the 18th Combined Arms and 1st Tank Armies, as well as two separate tank corps, from its reserve, to the front, with the approach of which the offensive was to begin.

By the end of 1943, the four Soviet fronts (without the 51st Army, which "plugged" the exits from the Crimea) had 188 divisions, 19 mechanized and tank corps, 13 brigades - 2,406,100 people, 28,654 guns and mortars, 2015 tanks and ACS. The Soviet Air Force (including long-range aviation) had 2,600 combat aircraft.

These figures are taken from the Soviet History of the Second World War. However, they are questionable. For example, it is argued that the forces were equal in terms of the number of tanks, moreover, these data "... refute the fictions of former Hitlerite generals and a number of modern bourgeois authors about the allegedly huge numerical predominance of Soviet troops ... It was characteristic here that the offensive began in the absence of a significant overall superiority in forces over the enemy.

But if we assume that all formations were fully staffed, then the Germans, as part of tank, motorized divisions and separate battalions, should have had 3287 tanks and assault guns. With the same count, the Soviet side (11 tank, 8 mechanized corps, 12 separate tank brigades, 21 separate tank regiment) has more than 6,000 tanks and self-propelled guns. Of course, both sides, waging continuous battles, suffered losses. But, I emphasize, both sides. And even if, and for sure, our losses were more than German, then the rotation of personnel, and

replenishment of equipment with us was carried out much faster. So General Vatutin, before a new offensive, received more than 1000 tanks and 16 fresh rifle and 3 cavalry divisions. Former commander of the 1st Tank Army, Marshal M.E. Katukov directly points out: "Again, the number of combat vehicles in the army was brought to the state - about 600." Since the beginning of December, the 3rd Guards Tank Army has been in reserve and replenished with equipment.

And Manstein, at a meeting with the Fuhrer, complained that Army Group South had lost 133,000 people, and received only 33,000 reinforcements.

Whether the case in the Red Army. During November-December 1943 alone, the four above-mentioned Soviet fronts in the battles near Kiev and in the lower reaches of the Dnieper lost 3,200 tanks, and in the next four months they will lose another 4,600 combat vehicles. And in total, more than 12,000 tanks and self-propelled guns burned down in the battles for the liberation of Ukraine.

Is it worth refuting "bourgeois authors"? After all, the ability to create superiority in your chosen theater or direction is the art of war. Hitler could not determine for himself a priority direction and did not have time to strengthen the southern flank. Comrade Stalin did it. As a result: "This numerical superiority made it possible for the Soviets to attack not only in one, but often in many areas at the same time, having an overwhelming superiority in forces. It allowed the enemy to make up for their often heavy losses surprisingly quickly.

And the Germans "... in heavy battles, the combat effectiveness of German formations fell. Infantry formations were constantly in battle. Tank formations, like a fire brigade, were thrown from one sector of the front to another.

Q.E.D.

Further, the German field marshal admits: "Of course, we did not expect from the Soviet side such great organizational skills that it showed in this matter, as well as in the deployment of its military industry. We met a truly hydra, in which two new ones grew in place of one severed head.

For some reason, our commanders are embarrassed about this. Probably, I want to show myself even more "skilled", to prove that they have learned to fight with "skill".

The beginning of the strategic offensive in the Right-Bank Ukraine was laid by the Zhytomyr-Berdichev operation of the 1st Ukrainian Front.

## ZHYTOMIR-BERDICHEV OPERATION

Having broken communications between Army Groups Center and South, the Soviet troops occupying the Kiev bridgehead hung over the entire enemy grouping in Right-Bank Ukraine. Therefore, the German command sought to eliminate this bridgehead and return Kyiv. The Soviet troops, carried away by the pursuit, did not conduct reconnaissance, did not provide flanks, and did not consolidate on the achieved lines.

On November 16, 1943, Colonel-General German Goth's 4th Panzer Army launched a counterattack on Kyiv, directing its main efforts along the Zhytomyr Highway. Inflicting a concentrated blow with seven tank and one motorized divisions on the stretched out troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the Germans badly battered the Soviet units and, advancing 35-40 km, again captured Zhytomyr, Korosten, Brusilov, surrounding part of the forces of the 60th Army and restoring the interrupted there was a railway connection with Army Group Center. It seemed that the way to Kyiv was open.

Worried, Stalin ordered Rokossovsky to temporarily hand over the command of the Belorussian Front to his deputy and immediately go to Vatutin as a representative of the Headquarters with authority if necessary, without waiting

additional instructions, to take command of the 1st Ukrainian himself: "We carefully examined the situation and did not find anything terrible. Taking advantage of the passivity of the front, the enemy assembled a strong strike force and began to strike first in one place, then in another. Vatutin, instead of responding with a strong counterattack, continued to defend himself. This was his mistake. He explained to me that if it were not for the proximity of the Ukrainian capital, he would have long ago risked taking active steps. But now Vatutin had every reason not to be afraid of risk. In addition to separate tank corps, two tank armies stood behind each other in the back of the head, not to mention the combined arms armies and artillery of the RGK. With this amount

troops were to advance, not defend. I advised Vatutin to urgently organize a counterattack on the presumptuous enemy. Vatutin actively set to work.

To help two combined-arms armies in a difficult situation, the front commander managed to transfer units of two armies from the Bukrinsky bridgehead, the 3rd Guards Tank Army from Fastov, the 1st Rifle and 7th Artillery Corps from the reserve to the dangerous sector. 152-mm and even 203-mm howitzers were put forward for direct fire. Fierce fighting lasted ten days. The 7th Panzer Division lost 70 percent of its strength during this time. Barely arrived from Europe, unfired, having no combat experience, the 25th Panzer General Schell, faced with the realities of the Eastern Front, fled the battlefield, earning a "psychic shock". Heavy casualties forced Hoth to stop advancing along the Zhytomyr-Kyiv Highway. After that, the Fuhrer brought the honored general to the reserve, announcing that Hoth was overtired. The new commander of the 4th Panzer Army was General of the Panzer Troops E. Raus.

Having reported to the Supreme Commander that Vatutin was leading the troops confidently and was coping with his duties, General Rokossovsky returned to Belarus.

On November 20, the command of the Army Group "South" sent a letter to the OKH, in which it was reported that, under the current state of affairs, the group would not be able to hold its positions during the winter: losses in people and equipment were not replenished, the arriving formations were sent to hold the unpromising from the operational point of view of the areas. Manstein proposed to urgently withdraw troops from the Dnieper salient, to evacuate the 17th Army from the Crimea; due to this, reduce the front line on its right wing, create reserves, strengthen the much more important northern flank.

These recommendations were not accepted: "As a reason for holding the Dnieper salient, Hitler still pointed to the importance of Nikopol and the Crimea for waging war. He still did not give up the hope that after the successful repulsion of enemy attacks in the Dnieper salient, it would be possible to strike in a southerly direction in order to re-establish contact with the Crimean group ... Every time he was made proposals to reduce the front, he let in the course of the argument that in this case, the enemy's forces will also be released. This, of course, could not be disputed. But at the same time, Hitler deliberately did not want to see that the attacker could exhaust his forces by attacking defensive positions if they were occupied by large forces. Any attempt to hold the line, which is occupied by troops in much the same way as the guard line, should lead to the fact that the too weak forces of the defender will be very quickly exhausted or the enemy will simply knock them out of these positions.

The Soviet command, taking into account the possibility of further enemy attempts to attack Kyiv, decided to defeat the 4th Panzer Army with a crushing blow and push it back to the Southern Bug. However, Vatutin's troops after

heavy fighting, which lasted from July 1943, could not solve this problem with the available forces. Therefore, the Stavka additionally included in the front two combined arms and the 1st tank army of Lieutenant General M.E. Katukov, as well as the 4th Guards and 25th Tank Corps. The 8th and 10th tank corps from the front left for staffing. That is, the number of tank formations on both sides was approximately the same, but the Soviets had the opportunity to "work in two shifts."

By November 24, 1943, the 1st Ukrainian Front included the 1st Guards, 13th, 18th, 27th, 38th, 40th, 60th combined arms, 1st and 3rd Guards Tank, 2nd



air army,  
54th and 159th fortified areas.

On November 28, the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front received a directive from the Headquarters, which stated:

"...1. The available forces of Nikolaev are not enough to carry out a counterattack and defeat the enemy forces. Therefore, it is necessary for Nikolaev to immediately switch to a tough defense with the task of exhausting the enemy forces with the forces of our artillery and aviation in attempts to attack him or separate attacks.

The defense must have at least three equipped lines with the maximum use of anti-tank and other mines.

2. With the approach of Leselidze, Katukov and other forces, it is imperative to organize our counteroffensive with the task of defeating the enemy forces and reaching the Southern Bug. This counteroffensive must be organized as thoroughly and thoroughly as it was done near Belgorod.

In accordance with this instruction, on November 29, Vatutin issued an operational directive in which the 13th, 60th, 1st Guards, 38th and 40th Armies were tasked with immediately switching to a tough defense and preventing the enemy from reaching Kiev.

The following were concentrated in the reserve of the front: the 18th Army in the Borodyanka, Gostomel area; 3rd Guards Tank Army - Chernogorodka; 1st Panzer Army - Svyatoshino, Tarasovka, Zhuliany; 5th Guards Tank Corps - Teterev, Peskovka; 4th Guards Tank Corps - Malin, Gorodishche; 1st Guards Cavalry Corps - Zauradie, Vyrva.

In the same directive, instructions were given - to replenish the rifle troops, to create stocks of fuel, ammunition, food.

At the same time, the development of a plan for the upcoming offensive operation began.

As expected, the enemy went on the offensive again in early December. This time, the German command decided to strike the main blow north of the Zhytomyr highway, trying to bypass Kyiv from the north.

On December 6, the 48th Panzer Corps struck in the direction of Malin, in the zone of the 60th Army, Lieutenant General I.D. Chernyakhovsky and the 1st Guards Army, Colonel General V.I. Kuznetsova. Driven out of Chernyakhovo, units of the 30th Rifle Corps, to put it mildly, hastily retreated. "The enemy attacked mainly at night," recalls Colonel A. B. Nemchinsky. - At night, units of the 4th Nazi Panzer Army, moving with headlights on and sirens howling, pierced a wide corridor in the battle formations of the 60th Army. During the day, the tanks stopped, but aircraft entered the battle, striking at the Soviet troops. They said that Rommel arrived at our site, who gave his word to Hitler to return Kyiv.

Chernyakhovsky's divisions, mining roads and hiding behind rearguards, withdrew to Malin. To slow down the advance of the tank group, groups of sappers - tank destroyers, who operated mainly at night, were widely used. Such groups of 3-4 people, armed with machine guns and anti-tank mines, were located near forest roads, clearings, in narrow places where enemy tanks were most likely to appear. Trenches were prepared and camouflaged in advance, and cables with mines attached to them were stretched. The trick was that when

enemy machine, choosing a cable, put a mine directly under the caterpillar. After that

I had to go out to my own people, report the number of the destroyed tank and receive the Order of Glory 3rd degree on my chest. Those who managed to return from such a task, of course, always "destroyed" something. For example, Moskalenko, without any doubt, reports that in the zone of his 38th army, sappers, acting behind enemy lines, destroyed 35 tanks and self-propelled guns, 5 armored personnel carriers in three days: "The effect of the massive use of fighter groups exceeded all our expectations." Three days later, the Germans began active operations in the area of Korosten and Yelsk against the 13th Army of Lieutenant General N.P. Pukhov. Despite certain successes of the widely advertised "powerful new offensive", the enemy failed to break through to Kyiv from the west. However, the bridgehead on the Teterev River, captured by the 1st Guards Army, had to be abandoned. As a result, the Headquarters of the Supreme Command removed Kuznetsov, appointing Colonel General A.A. in his place on December 15. Grechko.

The concept of the operation of the 1st Ukrainian Front provided for the delivery of four cutting blows in a strip of 200 km with a total length of the front strip of 460 km. It was planned to strike the main blow in the direction of Zhytomyr, Berdichev by the forces of the 1st Guards, 18th and 38th combined arms, 1st and 3rd Guards Tank Armies in order to defeat the enemy grouping in the Brusilov area - 8th, 19th, 25th tank divisions, the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" - and subsequently reach the Lyubar, Vinnitsa, Lipovets line.

Auxiliary strikes - it was planned to carry out - by troops located on the wings of the front: to the right of the main one - by the 60th Army with the 4th Guards Tank Corps - bypassing Zhytomyr to Shepetovka; on the left - by the adjacent flanks of the 40th and 27th armies with the participation of the 5th guards tank corps - to Khristianovka, where the connection with the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and the encirclement of the enemy group defending the Kanev ledge were to take place.

On the northern flank, the 13th Army, with the 1st Guards Cavalry and 25th Tank Corps attached to it, received the task of advancing on Korosten, Sarny, Novograd-Volynsky.

Support for the offensive of the front was assigned to the 2nd Air Army, Lieutenant General S.A. Krasovsky.

In preparing the operation, much attention was paid to measures to disinform the enemy. To divert attention from the direction of the main attack, the concentration of large forces in the Korosten direction and in the Bukrinsky bridgehead was imitated.

So, by the beginning of the operation, the 1st Ukrainian Front had 63 rifle, 3 cavalry divisions, the 1st Czechoslovak infantry brigade, 6 tank and 2 mechanized corps, 5 separate tank brigades, 16 tank and self-propelled artillery regiments. The front had 924,300 men, 11,387 guns and mortars, 12,300 anti-aircraft guns, 297 rocket artillery installations, 1,125 serviceable tanks and self-propelled guns, and 529 combat aircraft.

The front was opposed by the 4th Panzer Army, consisting of 14 infantry, 1 mountain rifle, 1 reserve, 2 security, 7 tank and 1 motorized divisions, the C corps, the SS Langemark motorized brigade, the 506th and 509th heavy tank battalions and 6 divisions of assault guns. Tank groups operated in two areas: four divisions in the Brusilov area and three in the Malin area. Corps groups were the remnants of two or three divisions brought together under a single command. In terms of size and organization, the corps group at best corresponded to one "normal" division, but our authors, in an effort to show the power of the enemy, considered them to be three.

The Germans, according to the Soviet Military Encyclopedia, had 574,000 men, 6,960 guns and mortars, 1,200 tanks and assault guns, and up to 500 combat aircraft of the 8th Aviation Corps of the 4th Air Fleet.

Again, both the first and second figures are questionable.

In general, Soviet historians used some kind of completely irrational mathematical apparatus, reminiscent of non-Euclidean geometry, where arbitrarily straight lines can be drawn through two points. Simple arithmetic did not fit: after all, it was necessary to show the power and advantage of the socialist industry, the military successes of the Red Army and the numerical superiority of the enemy at the same time. For example, by the beginning of November 1943, they counted 422 enemy tanks near Kiev, then they report that from November 3 to November 30, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front destroyed 1800 and captured 106 tanks and assault guns, and on December 24, from General Raus,

By

according to their statements, there are 1200 combat vehicles! That is, in less than two months, the 4th Panzer Army received 2,684 tanks and assault guns from nowhere. If we take into account that fierce battles were fought in the Malin area in December, then much more. It can be seen that the whole of Europe really worked for the 4th Panzer Army.

By the way, ten years earlier, the Military Historical Journal gave much more modest figures for the German group: 300,000 people, 3,500 guns and mortars, up to 600 tanks. As you can see, the enemy forces have almost doubled in a decade. In addition, 1200 tanks and assault guns is the figure of just the full staff of all divisions and battalions of the 4th Panzer Army. And, as mentioned above, in the attack on Kyiv, it was the tank units that suffered the heaviest losses. Marshal K.S. Moskalenko confirms that no more than 50% of the original composition remained in the German tank divisions. It just gives about 600

machines.

On the other hand, we know that on the eve of the operation, General Vatutin received four fully equipped tank and mechanized corps, which included approximately 1,100 tanks and self-propelled guns. Another 419 tanks and self-propelled guns were in three corps of Rybalko's tank army. If you believe our encyclopedias, it turns out that in all the other tank units of the front, and this is the 5th Guards Tank Corps, five separate tank brigades, six separate tank and ten self-propelled artillery regiments, there were no combat vehicles at all.

Therefore, we will not believe encyclopedias.

The threefold Soviet superiority in infantry played a big role. The number of front personnel, despite the loss of 108,000 killed and wounded, increased by 200,000 compared to November.

Thus, all nine armies were involved in the breakthrough. Strong groupings were created in each of the directions, with an especially powerful grouping in the direction of the main attack. In order to create high troop densities, the front command determined narrow breakthrough sections: for the main grouping - 18 km, for the 60th Army - 15 km, for the 40th and 27th armies - 10 km, and for the 13th army - in total 4 km. The operational density in the areas averaged 2-3 km per division, about 180-200 guns and mortars, more than 20 tanks per 1 km.

The selected width of the breakthrough sections provided the necessary conditions for bringing mobile groups into battle. At the same time, a small distance between the breakthrough areas from each other made it possible, with overcoming the tactical defense zone and

by expanding the breakthroughs towards the flanks, combine them into one common sector of the breakthrough and achieve the formation of a deep gap in the enemy defenses.

The transition to the offensive was planned to be made not simultaneously in all directions, but sequentially - first on the main one, on the second day on the left wing of the front and on the third day on the right wing. This allowed massively and more

effectively use aviation in each of the directions, as well as maneuver part of the RVGK artillery from the main direction to the auxiliary ones.

It was decided to bring the mobile groups into battle during the breakthrough of the main line of defense or after the rifle formations took possession of it.

By decision of the front commander, a single procedure for conducting an artillery offensive was established in all armies. Artillery preparation was scheduled for 90 minutes, support for the attack of infantry and tanks, which was supposed to begin at the 51st minute, was carried out by the method of successive concentration of fire.

The air offensive plan provided for two days before the start of the operation to strike at enemy headquarters, railway junctions and reserves, and immediately before the attack by all attack and bomber aircraft - on tactical defense. With the beginning of the breakthrough, the task was to support the attack of the main forces by continuously attacking enemy strongholds, and with the introduction of tank armies into battle, switch the main aviation forces to support them.

The Germans had an average of 13 km per division. Moreover, their defense was shallow and had a focal character. So, in the instructions of the commander of the 38th Army, the commanders were informed:

"The peculiarity of the enemy's defense in front of the front of the 38th Army and the neighbor on the right is: a) the high mobility of troops (tank formations with motorized infantry); b) in the system of placing tanks in small groups in settlements in order to increase maneuverability during counterattacks; c) in the presence of self-propelled artillery and, consequently, in its maneuverability; d) in the small number of enemy infantry. The expected way for the enemy to counter our offensive will be counterattacks by small groups of tanks with submachine gunners and attempts to launch a counterattack with tank and infantry reserves when fighting begins in the depths of the enemy defenses.

The task of the advancing units is: to get ahead of any enemy maneuver and, therefore, to be in full readiness to immediately repel his counterattacks or suppress any attempts to go on a counterattack.

Significant progress in the education of our commanders is demonstrated by the 14th paragraph of this document: "Bypassing the settlements defended by the enemy, from the flanks and rear, is considered an obligatory and the only correct type of maneuver, regardless of the strength of the enemy's resistance."

During the preparation of the offensive, there was a total mobilization of the male population in the liberated territories. The German General Staff - not unreasonably counted on the depletion of human resources in the USSR.

As of January 1, 1940, there were 19,798,354 people on the military register of privates and sergeants in the country. The orientation of the Soviet military doctrine to the conduct of an offensive victorious war led to the fact that the high military command was of the opinion that peacetime forces were sufficient for

combat operations for at least a year. The mobilization plan called for about 10 million fourteen ages to be called up: 5 million to send for the mobilization of the Red Army and the RKKF, 3.8 million to be used in the first year of the war to make up for the irretrievable losses of the existing fronts, 1.2 million to staff new units.

However, in the very first months of the war, the expenditure of human resources acquired catastrophic proportions. The rate of their "use" in June-July 1941 exceeded one million people per month. Over the mobplan, 2.1 million people were called up by this time. The losses of the Red Army by December, according to the most conservative estimates, amounted to 4.5 million killed, wounded, captured, of which more than 3

million - irretrievable losses. Behind the front line by this time there were 5.6 million conscripts. The following year, these figures were doubled.

Already on August 1, 1941, only 3.6 million were registered for military service under the age of 40. To search for human resources, on August 20, the People's Commissar of Defense No. 0308 was issued to replace the young rank and file and sergeants in all rear units and institutions, in a number of engineering units and Air Force units with older people, women and limited fit. Workers of defense enterprises, policemen, exiled migrants and those serving a sentence under criminal articles were unbooked and called up.

By the end of August 1941, it became obvious that all the available reserves of conscripts born in 1905-1918 were exhausted! And new decisions are being made: to call up the age of 1885-1905, to cancel the deferment from the draft, to reduce the draft age to 18 years, to reduce the requirements for the health of soldiers.

In 1944, the draft of seventeen-year-olds was allowed. In this situation, 70 million Soviet citizens living in the occupied territories were almost the only source of human resources.

The Germans understood this too: "Since the Soviets in the areas they recaptured from us immediately mobilized all men under the age of 60 fit for military service and used the entire population, without exception, even in the area of fighting, in military work, the Wehrmacht High Command ordered to be transported across the Dnieper and the local population. In fact, this coercive measure applied only to military personnel. But a significant part of the population voluntarily followed our retreating units in order to get away from the Soviets ... The number of civilians who joined us was probably several hundred thousand people.

At the same time, retreating beyond the Dnieper, German troops used the scorched earth tactics, removing or destroying food supplies, enterprises, the transport network, and residential buildings. However, at the end of 1941, Stalin used such tactics, destroying the Moscow region in order to "drive the Germans out into the cold." The difference is that the Germans destroyed someone else's, and we destroyed our own. And yet Manstein did not guess to award military orders to "outstanding daredevils for courageous actions to destroy settlements."

The residents who remained and waited for release were immediately drafted into the Red Army, where they were considered "second-class" people who fell under suspicion only because they lived in the territory occupied by the enemy. They were used as cannon fodder, often without giving out either weapons or uniforms. Here is evidence from a letter home from a German soldier: "On the newly occupied territory, the Red Army called up the entire population - men and women. The labor battalions formed from them are used to increase the mass of the attackers. Didn't have

meaning that these conscripts are not trained, most of them without weapons, and many without boots. The prisoners taken by us said that they expected to take weapons from the fallen. These unarmed people, forced to go on the attack, were suspected of collaborating with us and literally paid with their lives for this suspicion.

They raked everyone clean. The call was carried out by orders of the commanders of the fronts and armies. Due to these people, who were called, as a rule, directly to the unit, to a large extent there was an underestimation of Soviet irretrievable losses.

"Conscripts from the occupied, and especially the western, regions were regarded as potential traitors. In practice, they were driven into the attack, like cattle to the slaughterhouse. The calculation was that the

"black infantry" would only exhaust the Germans and force them to use up the supply

ammunition, so that later fresh units could force the enemy to retreat from their positions. Therefore, they did not give out to the unfortunate either uniforms or

rifles. Why spend money on those who are destined to die in the first battle. And it doesn't matter that they die, the NKVD will have less work after the war "(B.V. Sokolov, "Unknown Zhukov")

So, for example, units of the 38th army of General Moskalenko in the period December 1-15 "received replenishment, mainly from the mobilized local population of the liberated territory, with a total of 18,000 people aged 18-45 years." In ten days, these people, who have no military training, will be thrown into battle in the first echelon. Neighbors, the 18th Army, by mid-December also "received march reinforcements in the amount of 11,631 people ... Replenishment continued to arrive in the second half of the month."

For General Konev, the process of turning a "shpak" into a soldier generally took place with lightning speed: "The men of the liberated regions voluntarily joined the ranks of regular units engaged in combat operations with the enemy. For example, in only one village of Kvitki, about 500 men joined the 180th Infantry Division and here, on the outskirts of the village, they entered into battle with the attacking enemy. And what, the division armed them all? And where are these volunteers accounted for?

Only a few of these conscripts were destined to survive, become "normal" soldiers and receive uniforms and weapons.

It was still easier for infantry commanders to solve the problem of understaffing. But who, for example, should be put behind the levers of a tank? Marshal I.I. Yakubovsky recalls an acute shortage of specialists in the 3rd Guards Tank Army: echelons with brand new military equipment, but without crews, were flowing from the rear, and the personnel were replenished, as in other armies, "mainly due to mobilized in the liberated areas."

The breakthrough in the direction of the main attack began on December 24, 1943. Following reconnaissance in battle, a powerful artillery preparation was carried out, which began with a salvo of the 3rd Guards Heavy Mortar Division. Due to low cloud cover, the massive use of aviation was ruled out. Going on the attack, the troops of the front's main grouping quickly captured the enemy's strongholds and centers of resistance in the first position and attacked the second on the move. Here the fighting took on a more fierce character, the movement of rifle corps slowed down. In order to quickly complete the tactical defense breakthrough and break out into operational space, both tank armies were brought into battle in the middle of the day: in the 18th Army zone - the 3rd Guards Colonel General P.S. Rybalko (6th and 7th Guards Tank, 9th

mechanized corps, 91st separate tank brigade), in the band of the 38th army - the 1st tank army of Katukov (11th guards tank and 8th guards mechanized corps, 61st guards tank brigade).

As a result of their simultaneous strike north and south of Brusilov, enemy resistance was broken and by the end of the day the breakthrough of the tactical defense zone was completed. Tank armies advanced to a depth of 15-20 km, and combined arms armies - up to 10 km.

Given the state of the German defenses and the general balance of forces, it would be surprising if it had turned out differently. Indeed, in a strip 18 km wide from the Soviet side, 25 rifle divisions, 3 tank, 2 mechanized corps, 3 separate tank brigades, 4 separate tank and 2 separate self-propelled artillery regiments operated. The armies of Moskalenko and Katukov dealt the main blow in a 7-kilometer zone, having an operational density of 1200 meters per DIVISION.

All this magnificence was opposed by the 68th Infantry, 8th, 19th and "mentally traumatized" 25th Panzer Divisions, all together having 190 combat vehicles, as well as the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich".

For Manstein, who went to celebrate Christmas in the 20th motorized division, this blow came as a surprise: "I received the first reports about the beginning of the enemy's offensive on both sides of the Kiev Zhitomir highway while in the 20th motorized division, located behind the threatened sector of the front in reserve. ... Initially, the reports did not contain particularly disturbing information." In addition, the field marshal believed that Rybalko's tank army was located to the north, in the zone of the 13th army. And he had no information at all about the 1st Tank Army, secretly transferred from the Stavka reserve. He did not know about the appearance of the 18th army of Leselidze.

At that time, the 48th Panzer Corps continued its attempts to break through to the east from Malin into the rear of Chernyakhovsky's 60th Army.

"All this," concludes Marshal Moskalenko, "leaves no doubt that the enemy had no idea about the actual scale of the regrouping of our troops, and therefore did not know its goals either."

In general, the beginning turned out to be successful. The next day, despite a sharp deterioration in the weather, which limited the use of aviation and hampered the actions of ground troops, the formations of the strike force successfully moved forward.

The command of the Army Group "South" began a hasty transfer of the headquarters of the 48th Panzer Corps and its three tank divisions - the 1st, 7th and 1st SS "Leibstandarte" Adolf Hitler "- towards Zhytomyr.

On December 25, the 40th and 27th armies went on the offensive. By the end of the day, the breakthrough was expanded along the front to 80 km and to a depth of 20-30 km. Conditions were created for operational prosecution.

On the third day of the operation, when the operational defense was broken, and the enemy began to draw up his reserves in a direction that was dangerous for him, the groupings of the right wing of the front went on the offensive. The 60th Army of General Chernyakhovsky achieved especially great success. During the day, her troops advanced to a depth of 25 km.

On December 26, the 328th Rifle Division of the 1st Guards Army captured the important resistance center of Radomyshl.

On December 27, the strike groups of the front continued their offensive, although the enemy sharply increased resistance in the Zhytomyr direction. Having brought into battle three divisions of the 48th Panzer Corps, transferred from the Malin area, and the 18th artillery division, which arrived from under Belaya Tserkov, he launched numerous counterattacks in the Korostyshev area. But they were all repulsed, and the Soviet troops again advanced 25 km during the day. The army of Leselidze advanced somewhat more slowly, overcoming the forest area east of Zhytomyr. In the zone of the 1st Tank Army, the 11th Guards Tank Corps of General A.L. Hetman bypassed Kazatin from the north-west, and the 8th Guards Mechanized Corps of General S.M. Krivoshein - from the east. On December 28, the city was in the hands of the Soviet troops. On December 29, the troops of the 13th Army drove the enemy out of Korosten.

Such a rapid advance is explained by the fact that the opposing troops were defeated in the very first two days in the tactical defense zone, and the German command did not have large tactical and operational reserves.

Particularly serious losses were suffered by those German divisions that fell under the tank "skating rink" of the main grouping of the front: the 19th and 25th tank divisions, as well as the front line divisions - the 68th, 208th, 291st infantry divisions. The latter, in cooperation with the corps group "C", had to repel the blow of the entire 13th army of General Pukhov, which included 13 rifle divisions, 2 separate tank brigades and the 25th tank corps. Prisoners of the 208th Infantry Division showed that in the very first battles the division was almost completely bled and about 600 people remained in it. The commander of the 13th Army Corps reported that his formations

actually does not exist: in the divisions on the front line there are only 150-300 people left, and the infantry as a whole - no more than one regiment, the soldiers are exhausted.

General Mellenthin recalled: "We learned that the 24th Panzer Corps was defeated, that the Russians had broken through in the Brusilov area and are now developing a breakthrough. According to reports, they were moving towards Zhitomir, and the 48th Panzer Corps was given the task of delaying their advance ... The tank divisions of the 24th Corps (8th, 19th and SS Reich divisions) were placed at our disposal, but no one had any idea where they were and what kind of losses they had suffered. We believed that they could be found somewhere in the forests east of Zhytomyr. In any case, now we were obliged to determine the location of these unfortunate divisions and restore the front ... Some time later, our corps headquarters managed to establish radio contact with the 19th Panzer Division and transmit the order to break through to the area south of Zhitomir ... I will never forget this unusual Christmas. We received a radio message from the 19th division: "Attacked by 30 enemy tanks. There is no fuel. Help, help, help!" After that, the connection was terminated.

As for the 25th Panzer, 30% of the personnel remained in it with 20 tanks, and in German documents it was now listed as "the remnants of the division."

Thus, the tactical defense breakthrough in all four sectors was carried out within one day, and by the end of the third day of the operation, all the breakthroughs were combined into a common gap up to 200 km wide, and the armies switched to pursuit on a wide front. The German group, retreating from the Radomyshl region to Zhitomir, was pursued along parallel paths: from the southeast - the 3rd Guards Tank Army, and from the northeast - the 4th Guards Tank Corps from the front reserve. The Germans, retreating from Brusilov to Kazatin, were pursued by the 1st Panzer Army.

By December 30, the breakthrough was expanded to 300 km along the front, and its depth reached 100 km. Fights began for Zhytomyr, Berdichev, and Belaya Tserkov. According to Soviet data,



At the end of the sixth day of the offensive by the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the Germans lost up to 40,000 soldiers and officers killed and wounded, over 3,000 prisoners, 579 tanks, 92 assault guns, more than 700 guns and 680 mortars. You might think that General Routh had no tanks left at all, only, according to the enemy, the Wehrmacht lost 549 tanks and 267 assault guns on all fronts in December 1943.

By their offensive, Vatutin's troops, covering the enemy's Kanev grouping, created real prerequisites for its encirclement, which made it possible to create a significant gap in the enemy's operational defense, the development of an offensive in which could lead to a strategic breakthrough. It was for the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

The command of the Army Group "South", which until recently had been optimistic about the situation, was faced with the need for a "painful reassessment" of the situation. The front, over a vast expanse, creaked menacingly, ready to collapse. The 4th Panzer Army rolled back to the west. Hopes for the resumption of defense along the Dnieper disappeared. On December 25, Manstein again proposed to the OKH to leave the Nikopol ledge and, by reducing the front line, transfer Colonel General von Mackensen's 1st Panzer Army to its northern flank. Hitler still hesitated in making a decision.

In the hope of slowing down the pace of the Soviet offensive, the German command urgently pulled up reserves and reorganized command and control. The right-flank formations of the 4th Panzer Army - the 24th Tank and 7th Army Corps, essentially cut off in the Kanev ledge, and part of the troops from the 8th

On December 29, the armies were subordinated to the control of the 1st Panzer Army transferred from Apostolovo to Uman, whose troops were transferred to the control of the 6th Army. The connections of the latter made up the 44th separate corps. In the Khristianovka area, the 3rd Tank Corps was concentrated - the 6th, 17th Tank and 101st Light Infantry Divisions, southeast of Vinnitsa - the 46th Tank Corps allocated by the OKH, consisting of the 16th Tank, 1st Infantry and 4th Mountain Rifle Division. Six days were allotted for this regrouping, meanwhile the situation in the 4th Panzer Army zone was becoming critical.

At the end of December, serious events were brewing in the Zhytomyr region. A grouping of the 7th Panzer Division, part of the forces of the SS division "Adolf Hitler", 68th, 208th, 340th Infantry and 213th Security Divisions operated here.

The Germans intended to stubbornly defend the city, which was an important communications hub. The command of the 1st Ukrainian decided to defeat the enemy troops with a simultaneous blow from the flanks and from the front. In accordance with this plan, the divisions of the 60th Army bypassed the city from the northwest, cutting off the highway and railway Zhitomir-Novograd-Volynsky, and the 4th Guards Tank Corps of General P.L. Poluboyarova broke into the Vysokaya Pecha region, intercepting the road leading from Zhytomyr to the west. At the same time, formations of the 18th and 3rd Guards Tank Armies bypassed the city from the southeast and cut the Zhitomir-Berdichev highway and railroad. Troops of the Guards Army approached Zhitomir from the east.

As a result of the deep envelopment of the flanks of the Zhitomir grouping, the enemy's defensive measures in the Zhitomir region lost their significance. The threat of encirclement, hanging over the troops, forced the German command to leave this center of resistance and begin to withdraw its forces from Zhytomyr to the south in order to join the Berdichev group. December 31 troops of the 1st Guards and 18th

armies liberated the city.

With the liberation of Zhytomyr and Kazatin, the center of the main events moved to the Berdichev direction, where the main forces of the front rushed. The left-flank units of Katukov and Moskalenko, driving the remnants of the 25th Panzer Division in front of them, threatened communications in the area of Vinnitsa and Zhmerinka.

Two 75-kilometer gaps formed in the defense of the 4th Panzer Army. One in the north, in the Novograd-Volynsk and Rovno directions, where the 13th and 60th armies advanced; the other - in the Vinnitsa and Uman directions, in the bands of the 38th and 40th armies. For the German command, both gaps posed a great danger. The first of them separated the adjacent flanks of the "Center" and "South" groups and threatened to cover the entire left flank of the latter. The second gap tore apart the front of Army Group South. Rushing into it, the Soviet formations threatened to cut off the communications of the enemy troops defending in the bend of the Dnieper, which could later lead to their encirclement.

Thus, the immediate and greatest danger to the Germans was the loss of Vinnitsa, Zhmerinka and Uman. Therefore, the German command made desperate attempts to close this gap. It directed its main efforts to holding Berdichev and Belaya Tserkov, thereby striving to prevent the expansion of gaps in its front. At the same time, these attempts posed a threat to the formations of the 38th and 40th armies, which were striving to the southwest and south.

Fortunately for the Germans, despite the instructions to bypass the settlements "regardless of the strength of the enemy's resistance", the Soviet units were carried away by the capture of cities. After all, it was for this that awards were given, salutes sounded and honorary names were assigned to formations. For example, only for the liberation of Zhytomyr

17 units and formations became known as Zhytomyr. As Marshal Moskalenko testifies: "There were no prepared enemy defense lines in the army zone. The battles went for settlements and commanding heights, for which the enemy desperately clung. This circumstance gave Manstein, who was in time trouble, a chance to complete the regrouping of forces: "... the enemy forces were connected in battles with the isolated groups of troops of the 4th Panzer Army mentioned above. The enemy has not yet seen or, in any case, did not fully use the opportunities provided by his mobile formations due to the presence of these gaps to strike at rear communications or to encircle individual groups of troops of the 4th Panzer Army.

However, Vatutin did not hesitate long. In order to create a decisive turning point in the zone of the 40th Army, he subordinated to it the 5th Guards Tank Corps, Lieutenant General A.G. Kravchenko and sent him on a forced march from the right wing of the front to the city of Skvira and further in the direction of Zvenigorodka. The strike of the tankers contributed to a sharp increase in the pace of advancement of the 40th Army, as well as the 27th Army, which was operating to the left. On the night of January 4, Belaya Tserkov was liberated. On the right flank, the troops of General Pukhov captured Novograd-Volynsky on January 3.

The gap between the center of the 4th Panzer Army and the troops in the Kanev ledge reached 110 km. This is where the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front of the 1st Tank and 38th Armies turned. The first of them was supposed to advance in a southerly direction to Khristianovka and there to unite with the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, cutting off the enemy's retreat from the Kanev ledge.

In the center, heavy battles began for Berdichev, an important road junction, which was defended by units of the 1st Panzer Division, the SS division "Adolf Hitler" and the cavalry

regiment "South". The formations of the 1st Panzer and 18th Armies operating here at the end of December tried to capture the city on the move, but the attack failed. The battalions of the 44th Guards Tank Brigade that broke into the city were cut off by the enemy. At this time, other Soviet units were fighting on the outskirts of the city. On the fifth day they managed to break through the German defenses. Soviet tanks and infantry began to enter the city. The enemy did not survive. On January 5, the troops of the 18th, 38th, and 1st tank armies liberated Berdichev, joining forces operating in the encirclement. Three Soviet armies defeated three German divisions.

The 3rd Guards Tank Army, bypassing Berdichev from the west, tried to develop an offensive in the direction of Khmilnik, but got stuck in the defense of the 208th and 340th Infantry Divisions. Here, our tankers were unpleasantly surprised by the "previously unseen anti-tank devices" of the Germans. We are talking about the 88-mm Panzershek anti-tank reactive gun, the cumulative grenade of which burned through armor up to 150 mm thick (the thickness of the frontal armor of the T-34 tank was 47 mm, IS 2 - 120 mm). Rybalko's army suffered heavy losses in 15 days of fighting, only 59 tanks and 26 self-propelled guns remained in service.

The 27th Army, advancing on the left flank, captured Rzhishchev on January 7 and connected with the troops occupying the Bukrinsky bridgehead. Tank brigades of Katukov broke into Lipovets that day. Advanced Soviet detachments reached the area 30 km north of Uman, which was the supply base for von Mackensen's troops, as well as on the approaches to Vinnitsa, where the headquarters of Army Group South was located, which, due to the threat of loss of control, had to be transferred to Proskurov.

"History of the Second World War", referring to the archives, which, obviously, store the reports of our commanders about their victories, notes with satisfaction: "Only from December 24, 1943 to January 6, 1944, 72.5

thousand

German soldiers and officers, 1227 tanks and assault guns, 1311 guns and mortars, 4468 prisoners were captured, 246 tanks and assault guns, 1087 guns and

mortars, 3246 vehicles. The enemy suffered heavy losses in manpower and equipment in the following days of the operation. How much more! The summaries were compiled according to the Suvorov principle: "Write more, why feel sorry for them, adversaries." Again, interesting arithmetic turns out: General Raus, having 1200, and most likely, after all, 600 combat vehicles, managed to lose 1473 in two weeks. The tank army did not have a single tank left? It turns out nothing of the kind. According to Marshal Moskalenko, relying on data from "all types of reconnaissance": "Although most of the enemy's tank divisions, after the defeats they suffered, had a large shortage, nevertheless, up to 600 tanks were noted in their combat formations."

According to German data, for the whole of January, on all fronts, the losses of their ground forces amounted to 44,500 people killed and 22,000 missing, 531 tanks and 283 assault guns.

Nevertheless, the Soviet troops inflicted a heavy defeat on the 4th and 1st tank armies, pushing them back 80-200 km to the west and southwest on a 700-kilometer front. They almost completely liberated the Kyiv and Zhytomyr regions, a number of districts of the Vinnitsa and Rivne regions.

The troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front attacked the most sensitive place of the Army Group "South" - its northern flank, which threatened to cut off its main forces from the routes leading to Germany. The 1st and 4th tank armies suffered heavy losses: six of their divisions lost about half their strength, and two divisions were disbanded.

Vatutin's troops engulfed Army Group South even deeper from the north. With their right wing, they captured Sarny and reached the approaches to Rovno and Shepetovka, cutting off the main enemy road Vilnius-Odessa. Direct railway communication between the groups "Center" and "South" was interrupted, and the main forces of the latter were in danger of losing the tracks leading to Germany. The left-flank armies of the front created a real opportunity to encircle the enemy grouping in the Kanev ledge. The matter remained with the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

## KIROVOGRAD OPERATION

To resolve the situation on January 4, Manstein flew to the Fuhrer's Headquarters. The conversation got tough. The commander of Army Group "South" demanded that large forces be urgently allocated to strengthen his left flank, either by abandoning the Dnieper salient and the Crimea, or by using reserves. Hitler responded that leaving the Crimea would mean the withdrawal of Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania, the weakening of Army Group North would lead to the lifting of the blockade of Leningrad, the fall of Finland and the loss of dominance in the Baltic Sea, and he needed reserves in the West to repel the landing of the allies. Disappointed Manstein in a personal conversation advised the Fuhrer to transfer the High Command to someone more competent, Hitler, of course, was of a different opinion. On that they parted: "So I had to return, having achieved nothing either in terms of easing the position of the army group, or in terms of resolving the issue of our High Command ... If our front was able to hold out during January not only in the area of the Nikopol bridgehead, but and in the Dnieper arc, this is due to the dedication of the German soldier. His exploits during these continuous heavy defensive battles are beyond description at all.

The situation for Manstein was further complicated by the fact that at that time the 2nd Ukrainian Front had begun the Kirovograd offensive operation.

Troops under the command of General of the Army Konev crossed the Dnieper in September 1943 and, developing an offensive in the Cherkasy and Kryvyi Rih directions, threw back the 8th German Army that opposed them 30-100 km from the river, capturing Cherkassy, Znamenka, Alexandria.

Temporarily going on the defensive, the Soviet armies were understaffed, replenished with weapons, ammunition and prepared a new offensive on their left flank.

However, the successes achieved in the Zhytomyr-Berdichev operation created new opportunities for developing the offensive in other directions. In connection with significant changes in the situation, it was necessary to clarify the tasks for the troops of all fronts operating in the Right-Bank Ukraine. As early as December 29, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command decided on the close cooperation of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts to defeat the enemy in the Kanev salient.

Prior to this, the 2nd Ukrainian Front was preparing a strike in a southerly direction on Bereznegovatoe with the aim of defeating the enemy's Nikopol-Krivoy Rog grouping together with the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts. Now he was ordered to transfer the main efforts from the left wing to the center and, no later than January 5, deliver the main blow to Kirovograd, Pervomaisk, the auxiliary one - to Shpola, Khristianovka in order to connect with Vatutin's troops there. The task of the 3rd Ukrainian Front was also specified. He was supposed to use the success of the 1st and 2nd fronts to advance to the Southern Bug. The task of the 4th Ukrainian Front remained the same: Crimea.

At the disposal of Konev, the Headquarters allocated the necessary forces and materiel. So, at the end of December, the 5th Don Guards Cavalry Corps under the command of Major General A.G. entered the front. Selivanova. Over the previous three months, the losses of the front amounted to 303 thousand people, replenishment - 435 thousand.

By the beginning of January, the 2nd Ukrainian included the 4th, 5th and 7th guards, 37th, 52nd, 53rd and 57th armies, the 5th guards tank, 5th air armies, the 5th guards cavalry, 20th th tank, 1st, 7th and 8th mechanized corps. In total, the front had 59 rifle, 3 cavalry divisions, 3 tank, 4 mechanized corps, 3 separate tank brigades, 4 separate tank regiments. Before the operation, the 7th Mechanized Corps was transferred to the command of the commander of the 5th Guards Army, and the 8th Mechanized Corps was included in the 5th Guards Tank Army.

By January 1, the front consisted of 594,000 people, 7136 guns and mortars, 700 combat aircraft, 265 tanks, 127 self-propelled guns, according to a Soviet source. Contradicting itself, the same source literally on the previous page says that "to replenish the tank troops, the front received 300 tanks and 100 self-propelled guns." Only in the tank army of Rotmistrov in combat readiness there were 238 tanks and self-propelled guns out of a total of 336 vehicles.

In front of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, on the 260-kilometer stretch from Kanev to Bashtany, the 8th German Army of General of the Infantry Otto Wehler was defending, which by January 5 had 8 infantry, | cavalry, 4 tank, 1 motorized divisions, a separate assault brigade of the SS "Wallonia", the 8th and 503rd tank battalions, 4 divisions of assault guns - more than 420,000 people, 520 tanks and assault guns, 5100 guns and mortars, about 500 combat aircraft.

The main part of these forces was in the first echelon. And of course, "the front had a slight overall superiority over the enemy in forces and means, and even inferior to him in tanks."

The main line of defense consisted of a system of strongholds with a developed system of trenches. Due to the lack of forces in a number of sectors of the front line, the Germans had

only rifle trenches for three to five people, widely used barbed wire - slingshots, Bruno spirals, as well as dense minefields to cover approaches to the front line and gaps between strong points. The second lane ran 6-8 km from the front line and was much less equipped. Kirovograd itself was heavily fortified: stone buildings were adapted for defense, a dense system of cross and flank fire was created, the approaches to the city were covered by a system of wire and mine barriers, and important structures inside the city were mined: bridges, large buildings, an airfield.

"Thus," Marshal Konev testifies, "the enemy's defense, built according to the system of field-type structures, was not deep enough and in a number of areas was occupied by understaffed, thoroughly battered in previous battles, but still combat-ready formations of the enemy."

The combat area was an open area, poor in forests, but heavily indented with gullies and ravines. In early January, the snow cover in this area did not exceed 20 cm, which allowed the troops to maneuver off the roads. Dry weather and slight frosts also favored the offensive. True, frequent cloudiness and fog limited the actions of aviation and artillery.

So, in accordance with the directive of the Headquarters, Konev made a new decision and

gave the troops new tasks. Two strikes to the south and north of Kirovograd were supposed to end with the encirclement of the enemy, after which it was planned to make a throw to Khristianovka, towards the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, and to Pervomaisk, forming a grandiose "boiler". The armies of the right wing of the front were to carry out independent breakthroughs in order to dissect the encircled Kanev grouping of the enemy.

52nd Army Lieutenant General K.A. Koroteeva struck in the direction of Balakley, Shpola and further to Khristianovka with a turn of part of the forces towards Korsun Shevchenkivskiy. 4th Guards Army Major General A.I. Ryzhov - in the general direction to Ivangorod, Zlatopol.

53rd Army Lieutenant General I.V. Galanin with the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, Major General B.M. Skvortsov received the task of striking at Malaya Viska.

The front delivered the main blow in the Kirovograd direction with the forces of two shock groups. One of them is the 5th Guards Army of Lieutenant General A.S.

Zhadov and the 7th mechanized corps of General F.G. Katkova - was supposed to strike around Kirovograd from the north-west, and the other - the 7th Guards General Colonel M.S. Shumilov and the 5th Guards Tank Army - from the south-west with

the task of encircling and destroying the enemy in the Kirovograd region, and then developing an offensive against Novoukrainka, Pomoshchnaya.

The actions of the troops were supported by the aviation of the 5th Air Army of Lieutenant General S.K. Goryunov.

To carry out the Nikopol-Krivoy Rog operation, the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts planned three army strikes each.

Konev planned to defeat the Kirovograd group of Germans within two days, placing great hopes on the actions of mobile units. Thus, General Zhadov was tasked with liberating Kirovograd by the end of the first day of the operation. The front commander gave two days to prepare for the offensive.

The concentration and regrouping of troops were carried out in the strictest secrecy. The necessary orders to the troops were given orally or through liaison officers. Any telephone conversations related to the upcoming offensive were strictly prohibited. Radio facilities worked only for reception. All this ensured the secrecy of the concentration of troops in the direction of the main attack, in

resulting in surprise.

The density of artillery in the breakthrough areas was 120, in the band of the 5th Guards Army - 148 barrels per 1 km. The power of the fire was reduced by the fact that the front at the beginning of the operation had an insufficient amount of ammunition - 0.6-1.1 combat sets, as a result of which 0.6 ammunition was assigned to artillery preparation and 0.4 ammunition to support the attack. The weather did not favor the use of aviation.

On January 4, in order to open the enemy's fire system, the troops traditionally conducted reconnaissance in force.

On the morning of January 5, 1944, the day the operation began, due to low cloud cover and fog, the aircraft could not take off. But the weather was not expected to improve, and the artillery preparation began at the appointed time.

At 9 o'clock, on the signal "Sea", the infantry went on the attack. In the breakthrough area south of Kirovograd, the enemy was weakly suppressed. Despite all the measures of secrecy, the Germans managed to open the Soviet preparatory measures, they well hid their manpower and firepower from artillery fire, and with the beginning of the attack they put up fierce resistance. The stubborn attacks of our divisions, following one after another, did not lead to success. The lack of air support also had an effect.

Under these conditions, the front commander ordered Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army to be brought into battle with the task of breaking through the defenses together with the infantry and completing the task of the day.

The tank army was introduced in two echelons: in the first - the 29th and 18th tank, in the second - the 8th mechanized corps. However, they, having met on their way an organized defense saturated with tanks and anti-tank artillery, advanced slowly. By the end of the day, the joint efforts of rifle and tank formations managed to complete the breakthrough of only the main strip.

Otherwise, a breakthrough developed in the direction of operations of the northern strike force. The enemy, having learned about the concentration of the 5th Guards Tank Army south of Kirovograd, did not react to reconnaissance in force in the zone of the northern strike group and did not close the battle formations in front of it. At 9 o'clock the infantry, supported by a consistent concentration of fire, went over to the attack. In the zone of the 53rd Army, at the same time, the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps went on the offensive. At 11 o'clock, after breaking through the first position, the 7th mechanized corps, which had only 41 tanks, entered the battle in the band of the 5th Guards Army. The blow of two armies, reinforced by two tank corps, made it possible in the first hours to create a gap in the defense 18 km wide, which the enemy could not close with tactical reserves, and the operational ones were located to the south. Tank corps broke through the second position, and then the entire main line of defense. By the end of the day, Katkov's mechanized corps broke out to a depth of 24 km.

To build up the force of impact and develop success, Konev regrouped the 8th mechanized corps from the southern grouping to this direction, taking it from Rotmistrov and subordinating it to Zhadov. Despite the reinforcement, the northern grouping could not enter the operational space: the enemy, realizing that the main blow was now being delivered north of Kirovograd, transferred his tank units there.

However, the weakening of the German defense south of the city allowed the 7th Guards Army, together with the 5th Guards Tank Army, to break through the second lane and by the end of the day advance to a depth of 20 km, and advance units to reach the southeastern outskirts of Kirovograd.

During the second day, the southern group advanced another 6-7 km. On the night of January 7, the 29th Tank Corps of Major General I.F. Kirichenko went to the southern outskirts

Kirovograd, following the tankers, units of the 297th and 50th rifle divisions broke into the city.

By 9 o'clock on January 7, the 7th and 8th mechanized corps bypassed the city from the northwest and cut the highway and the Kirovograd-Novoukrainka railway. At the same time, units of the 18th Panzer Corps, advancing south of Kirovograd, cut the Kirovograd-Rovnoye road. Thus, an enemy grouping of four

divisions - the 3rd and 14th tank, 10th motorized and 376th infantry - operating in the Kirovograd region, lost the main escape routes to the west. The southern group merged with the northern.

The Germans had a strict order from the Fuhrer to hold Kirovograd at any cost. However, the commander of the 3rd Panzer Division, General Bayerlein, saw no reason to keep the mobile group tied to the city. Taking advantage of the lack of communication with higher authorities, the general decided to go for a breakthrough.

"An interesting question arose," says the German historiographer Paul Karel. - The conduct of the last war was largely determined by the progress of communications. Serious operational decisions could be communicated and enforced within minutes. The redeployment of large formations could be coordinated with lightning speed. Where in the past couriers had to drive their horses only to find they were late anyway, now all that was required was an encrypted radio message, an unlistenable UHF conversation hundreds of kilometers away, or a teletype conversation.

However, the advantages of the means of modern communication were often destroyed by their drawback - they limited the freedom of action of military commanders during battles. One can constantly ask questions, drill commanders and change orders without knowing local conditions. Thus, both on the German and on the Russian side in the last war, the initiative of military officers and commanders was kept in check. This circumstance had especially disastrous consequences. Stalingrad is the most striking illustration, and there were many other convincing cases. So, an unexpected break in communication could be a happy pause for the combat commander, during which he could rely only on his own judgment and the soldier's own conscience.

I must say that there were few such truly enterprising commanders in the Red Army, and there were only a few of them in the Wehrmacht - all were already sufficiently "drilled". Therefore, three other divisional commanders did not support Bayerlein's idea. On the night of February 7-8, the 3rd Panzer, having knocked down a few Soviet barriers, made a successful breakthrough to the west, covered the gap in the German front north of Kirovograd and stopped the advance of the 7th and 8th mechanized corps with counterattacks.

Two days later, Hitler gave the encircled group permission to operate. On the night of February 9-10, three German divisions with a surprise attack left the Ingul and restored a solid front, having the 3rd Panzer Division on the left, and the Dead Head motorized division on the right.

On January 8, the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front liberated Kirovograd and in the following days advanced west by another 15-20 km.

In the direction of the auxiliary strike, the troops of the 52nd and 4th Guards Armies only by January 7 overcame enemy resistance and by January 10 advanced 20-30 km.

In an effort to fulfill the task set by the Headquarters - to connect with Vatutin's troops in the Khristianovka area - Konev regrouped Rotmistrov's tank army into the 53rd Army zone and again brought it into battle. However, the army, weakened in previous battles, was unable to develop success.

The offensive of the 2nd Ukrainian Front bogged down. Konev reported on the destruction of 293 tanks, 40 self-propelled guns and 15,000 enemy soldiers and officers, and also that, due to the severe fatigue of the troops, he could not continue the operation. IN



operational reports compiled on the basis of reports from the armies, the front commander even had to underestimate the losses of the enemy, curbing the imagination of his subordinates. So, for example, the Military Council of the 5th Guards Army reported the destruction of over 19,000 Nazis, 123 tanks, 25 aircraft. After the war, they will refer to their own reports as archival documents. According to German data, only the 503rd heavy battalion with a battalion of "panthers", reduced to the "Beke" group, knocked out 267 Soviet tanks, losing one "tiger" and four "panthers".

In his memoirs, the marshal modestly noted that even so "the goal had already been achieved", and the village of Gadyukino, that is, Khristianovka, did not interest him. And, of course, "they forced the German fascist command to transfer significant forces here from other directions." In fact, it was from this direction, despite the "daring, highly maneuverable" actions of Konev, that the "fascist German command" transferred troops to Uman. In general, Manstein himself would have gladly left the Kanev ledge, but even here Hitler did not want to voluntarily cede the coast of the Dnieper, hoping in the future to strike from here to the east and again seize the eastern part of the arc.

The most important result of the operation of the 2nd Ukrainian Front was the liberation of Kirovograd - a strong stronghold and an important road junction, which violated the stability of the defense of the 8th Army. The penetration of Soviet troops into the enemy defenses in the Kirovograd direction endangered the flanks of both the Korsun Shevchenko and Kirovograd groups. However, Konev's troops failed to break out into the operational space and close the encirclement in the rear of the Kanev group.

Troops of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts on January 10-11 launched an offensive against the 6th German Army in the area of Nikopol and Krivoy Rog, but unsuccessfully.

Lacking the strength to decisively counterattack in several directions, the command of the Army Group "South" in the first place took measures to eliminate the greatest threat - a breakthrough between the 4th and 1st tank armies. Manstein's tactics in solving this problem are simple in presentation and extremely difficult to execute: "Where we had any sufficient forces, we left the enemy to attack us from the front and inflicted heavy losses on him. In other cases, we tried, by means of a timely withdrawal in separate sectors, to prevent him from driving us out of our positions with superior forces by an offensive. Repeatedly, by concentrating tank formations, we were able to stop the enemy who had broken through, and when it was possible, to use the mistakes made - for example, when he dared to go too far ahead after the breakthrough - to launch counterattacks.

All arriving reserves rushed to cover the gap in the Vinnitsa-Uman sector. 12 divisions were concentrated in this area, including new ones: the 16th Panzer from the Army Group Center, the 96th and 254th Infantry from the North Group, the 371st Infantry from Germany, the 332nd Infantry from the restoration, four Hungarian and one Romanian divisions from the army group reserve.

The German command planned to strike from three sides, taking

the enemy in pincers. From the east, from the location of the 1st Panzer Army, the 7th Army Corps, withdrawn from the Kanev ledge, attacked the flank. From the west, on the other flank - the 46th Panzer Corps. Strike from the south

3rd Panzer Corps released from the Dnieper salient. Its task was to, by maneuvering, delay and pin down the enemy until both other corps

concentrate on the attack.

By this time, the Soviet units were somewhat "carried away" by the breakthrough. On January 10, the 38th and 1st tank armies were fighting on the near approaches to Vinnitsa. Parts of the 11th Guards Mechanized Corps, Lieutenant General A.L. The hetman was cut off the railroad at the Vinnytsia-Zhmerynka section near the village of Yaryshevka. 8th Guards Mechanized Corps Major General I.F. Dremova crossed the Southern Bug and captured a number of settlements on its western coast. The 1st Guards Tank Brigade broke into the eastern outskirts of Zhmerinka and, intercepting a section of the railway leading from here to Odessa, destroyed the tracks and destroyed several echelons. The troops of the 40th Army were 10 km from Uman, and the 5th Guards Tank Corps broke out to Zvenigorodka.

The front line of the advancing troops formed a ledge, advanced to the west, in the direction of Vinnitsa. In addition, the troops of the front in recent days have been operating in divergent directions. As a result of a significant advance to the northwest, southwest and south, the offensive front reached about 700 km, and in a number of places it was not solid.

By January 10, the German command had concentrated six divisions and two divisions of assault guns of the 46th tank and 13th army corps east of Vinnitsa. These troops launched a counterattack against the Katukov and Moskalenko formations that had advanced forward.

At the same time, the forces of the 6th and 17th tank divisions, the 506th tank battalion and the 249th assault gun division of the 3rd tank corps, the Germans launched a counterattack in the area northwest of Uman against units of the 5th Guards Tank Corps and 40th Army. Two rifle divisions and a motorized rifle brigade were surrounded.

From January 14, counterattacks began to be undertaken along the entire front. Thus, Manstein managed not only to reliably tie down the shock groups of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, but also to allocate part of the forces to strike at the advancing armies of Vatutin. The Soviet troops had to stop the offensive and concentrate their main efforts on repelling counterattacks. Both sides brought additional infantry, tanks, artillery and aviation forces into the battle.

The Germans advanced 25-30 km, but failed to achieve more. After a week-long respite on January 24, they again struck in the Vinnitsa and Uman directions and, after four days of fighting, surrounded units of the 1st Panzer and five divisions of the 17th and 21st Corps of the 38th Army in the Lipovets area. On January 27, the 2nd Tank Army of Lieutenant General S.I., who had arrived from the Stavka reserve, was thrown to the aid of Moskalenko and Katukov. Bogdanov. True, our generals complain that this army had only two "small" corps. But, at the very least, Bogdanov had about 300 cars. Another thing is that the 2nd Panzer was brought into battle extremely unsuccessfully: on a wide front and in parts. She failed to achieve decisive results, but the encircled Soviet units managed to break out of the ring, although they suffered heavy losses.

According to Manstein, "the enemy lost, along with 8,000 killed, only 5,500 prisoners, 700 tanks, over 200 guns." Marshal Moskalenko ridicules these "fantastic numbers of the Hitlerite Field Marshal" and immediately reports that on January 28, the 3rd Guards Tank Army had 73 tanks and 13 self-propelled artillery installations, and in the 1st Tank Army - only 67 tanks and 22 self-propelled guns. But after all, Katukov's army entered the operation fully equipped, with about 600 combat vehicles. Moreover, on January 15, the 31st tank

corps from the Stavka reserve, numbering 260 tanks and self-propelled guns. Hence the loss - 771 cars. In fact, nothing was left of the 1st Panzer, except for headquarters, and by order

front commander, its department was withdrawn to the rear for staffing. The same can be said about the 5th Guards Tank Corps of General V.M. Alekseev. Rybalko's army was withdrawn to the reserve a week earlier: it entered the battle with 419 serviceable tanks and self-propelled guns, received the same number from the reserve and from the repair service during the battle, and lost 752 combat vehicles ("3rd Guards Tank" p. 151 ). Let us clarify that, since the battlefield remained with the Red Army, not

All

the losses in this case were irretrievable. Thus, the repair brigades of the 3rd Guards Army during the operation returned 328 units of armored vehicles to service. The scale of human losses can be roughly estimated, given the fact that the 1st Ukrainian Front, on average, lost up to 4,000 soldiers per day in killed and wounded.

On January 29, active hostilities in this direction ceased. Since the troops of the two fronts joined in the Zvenigorodka area, Manstein had other concerns. The troops of the 1st Guards, 18th, 38th and 40th armies entrenched themselves on the occupied line.

The 13th Army, operating on the right wing of the front, in order to avoid a break with the 61st Army of the Belorussian Front, already on January 11 stopped the offensive with its main forces, pushing forward detachments to the Goryn River and occupying Sarny, Vladimirets, Kostopol, Tuchin.

## KORSUN-SHEVCHENKOV BATTLE

The course of the first operations in the Right-Bank Ukraine showed that the enemy still had sufficient forces to maintain the stability of his strategic front. Its crushing was possible either by inflicting a series of deep cutting blows, as outlined by the original plan, for which the fronts did not yet have enough strength, or by first carrying out local operations with the available forces, during which it would be possible to undermine the enemy's defenses, and then, inflicting deep blows, crush his front and complete the tasks outlined

for the winter campaign.

The headquarters, accumulating forces for the summer-autumn campaign of 1944, chose the second path, for which three operations were planned:

Korsun-Shevchenkivska - by the forces of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts,

Rivne-Lutsk - on the right wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front,

Nikopol-Krivoy Rog - by the armies of the 3rd Ukrainian Front.

By this time, combat operations at the junction of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts had acquired particular importance. The German command continued to do everything possible to hold the Kanev bridgehead and prevent these fronts from closing the adjacent flanks. It gathered new forces against them and created powerful tank barriers on the way of the offensive to Khristianovka. A large grouping in the Kanev area and tank fists to the west and south of it tied up the actions of the fronts, hindered their advance towards the Southern Bug.

In a directive dated January 12, the Stavka demanded more coordinated actions from Vatutin and Konev, noting: "The offensive of the main groups of both fronts

develops in parallel directions, and decisive measures are not taken to eliminate the remaining enemy ledge. The immediate task was set: to encircle and destroy the enemy grouping in the Kanev ledge by attacking the armies of the left wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the right 2nd Ukrainian Front along converging directions to Shpola. Compared to the previously set task of attacking Khristianovka, the depth of the strikes of both fronts was significantly reduced due to the displacement of the breakthrough areas closer to the Dnieper. This allowed

bypass the tank barriers created by the enemy north of Uman and northwest of Kirovograd, and facilitated the encirclement of the Kanev group.

Due to the need for careful preparation of the planned operation, the offensive of the troops in the adjacent sectors of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts was temporarily suspended.

Thus, in mid-January, all Ukrainian fronts took a time out. Preparing new strikes, the Soviet Supreme High Command replenished the active fronts with people, military and transport equipment.

The 1st Ukrainian Front included the 47th combined arms (9 rifle divisions) and 2nd tank (3rd and 16th tank corps) armies, the 6th guards cavalry and 5th mechanized corps, with 22 January to February 3, the front received 400 T-34 tanks. On the basis of the 5th Mechanized and 5th Guards Tank Corps, a new 6th Tank Army was formed under the command of Lieutenant General A.G. Kravchenko. Historian General A.N. Grylev specifically stipulates that 107 tanks and self-propelled guns have gathered in this army. But why? Is it possible that a mechanized corps arrived from the reserve of the Headquarters, staffed only by 40 percent? Here's the misfortune: the German divisions are always in battle, we break them all the time, and there are more and more tanks in them; in our even the freshest cases of equipment is constantly lacking! True, Marshal Konev casually notes that General Kravchenko had 107 military vehicles after the breakthrough to Zvenigorodka.

The 5th Don Guards Cavalry Corps arrived at Konev under the command of Major General A.G. Selivanov, who was previously part of the 4th Ukrainian Front. The 37th Army from the 2nd Ukrainian Front, a mechanized corps from the 4th Ukrainian Front, and a rifle corps from the Headquarters reserve were transferred to the 3rd Ukrainian Front.

Manstein received nothing from the OKH other than instructions to hold positions at all costs. The field marshal became more and more disappointed in his Supreme Commander-in-Chief: "It was impossible to get operational instructions from him on how further operations should be carried out in general, and not only today and in addition to clinging to space."

At the end of January, almost simultaneously, three offensive operations prepared by the command of the Soviet fronts in a short time, united by a common plan, began at once. The battle of Shevchenko became the central and most spectacular of them. At the same time, General Vatutin was in a difficult position: he simultaneously carried out two offensive operations on the flanks and repelled a counterattack in the center.

In the Kanev ledge, deeply cut into the location of the Soviet troops, at that time the German group was holding the defense, which included 9 infantry divisions, the 5th Panzer Division of the SS "Viking", the SS "Wallonia" brigade and 4 divisions of assault guns from the 1st Panzer and 8th field armies. The top of the protrusion rested on

Dnieper near Kanev. Its width at the base reached 130 km, and the total area reached about 10 thousand square meters. km. In Hitler's desire to keep him at any cost, not the last place was occupied by propaganda calculations - German cooks are still "drawing water from the Dnieper." Preparing for a stubborn defense, the enemy carefully fortified his positions. At the base of the ledge, where the front stabilized only in mid-January, he failed to complete the defensive work. The Germans had no reserves in the ledge itself. However, three tank divisions of the 8th Army were stationed west of Kirovograd, and three tank divisions of the 1st Tank Army were operating southeast of Okhmatov.

The plan of the Soviet Headquarters was to inflict powerful counter-attacks under the base of the ledge by the troops of the two fronts and unite in the Shpola-Zvenigorodka area. General Vatutin was able to allocate 6 rifle divisions of the 40th and 27th armies and two corps of the 6th tank army for the operation, which received the task of breaking through the defenses on the 15-kilometer section of Tynovka - Koshevoye. The plan of the 2nd Ukrainian Front provided for a breakthrough in the Verbovka-Krasnosilka area on a 19-kilometer section by the adjacent flanks of the 4th Guards and 53rd armies and the development of an offensive on Shpola and Zvenigorodka. In the zone of the 53rd Army, it was planned to introduce Rotmistrov's tank army, transferred from near Kirovograd (18th, 20th, 29th tank corps), and the Don Cavalry Corps.

In order to regroup the 5th Guards Tank Army from the left wing of the front to the right, a 135 km long road was built in four days. The demining of roads for the rocade was carried out by one engineer battalion and an engineering battalion of mine detectors. So, it turns out that 160 dogs worked as "mine detectors". The history of the service of four-legged "friends of man" in this war, as well as the history of our engineering troops in general and various special forces brigades in particular, has not yet been written. During the war years, more than 60 thousand dogs were sent to the troops; in the Red Army there were four separate battalions of communication dogs, 6,000 miner dogs that neutralized 4 million mines, more than 300 destroyed combat vehicles are listed on the account of anti-tank dogs.

To pin down the enemy forces and divert them from the direction of the main attack, it was planned to launch an offensive with the forces of the 5th and 7th Guards Armies the day before the start of the operation. To the right of the strike force, the 52nd Army was supposed to attack. Thus, Konev allocated 35 rifle divisions, 3 tank divisions, 1 cavalry corps.

Support for the troops of the fronts was assigned to the aviation of the 2nd and 5th air armies, as well as to the 10th air defense fighter aviation corps of the country. By the beginning of the operation, due to intra-front regroupings in the directions of the main attacks of the fronts, superiority over the enemy in terms of the number of troops was created by 3-4, artillery by 3-6, tanks and self-propelled guns by 5-10 times. In terms of aviation, the forces of the parties were approximately equal.

The operation was prepared and carried out in difficult conditions of thaws and spring thaws that began early in Ukraine. Broken and muddy roads hampered the maneuver of troops and the supply of materiel. The question of the accumulation of ammunition was acute. Inclement weather and unpaved airfields that had fallen into disrepair limited the possibility of using aviation. In addition, the preparation of the operation was given a very short time - 5-7 days.

The offensive of the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front began on January 24 with the actions of reinforced forward battalions. Supported by artillery and small groups of attack aircraft, they broke the resistance of the 389th Hessian Infantry Division at the forefront with a surprise attack and by the end of the day on a 16-kilometer front advanced to a depth of 6 km.

"In such a situation," says Army General A.I. Radzievsky, — it would be expedient to resolutely build on the success achieved by the forward battalions by bringing into action the main forces of the front's strike force. However, the front command did not change the original plan of the operation and did not bring in the main forces that day. As a result, the enemy was given time to transfer his forces to the breakthrough site from other directions.

On the morning of January 25, after a ten-minute fire raid, the main forces of the 4th Guards and 53rd armies were brought into battle. They immediately met stubborn

enemy resistance. The effectiveness of suppressing it with artillery fire was insufficient. The aviation of the front did not operate due to bad weather.

An immediate increase in the efforts of the advancing troops was required. However, the armies and corps, built in one echelon, did not have the strength and means for this, and in 14

hours Konev, on a sector only 6 km wide, brought into battle the 5th Guards Tank Army, which had 236 tanks and self-propelled guns. Working closely with the infantry of General Galanin, Rotmistrov's tankers completed the breakthrough of the tactical defense zone and advanced to a depth of 18 km by the end of the day.

On the second day, the offensive of the armies slowed down, as they had to repulse a number of counterattacks of units of the 14th Panzer and 57th Infantry Divisions of the enemy hastily transferred to the site. On January 27, the Germans attacked from the south with the 3rd, 11th and 14th Panzer Divisions. At the same time, an infantry group, reinforced by tanks from the Viking division, struck from the north. After fierce fighting, the enemy closed the gap in their defenses, and two corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army were cut off from the main forces.

Konev, assessing the current situation, made a bold decision: Major General I.F. Kirichenko to take up defense with the front to the south, on the 20th to continue to develop the offensive on Shpola, Zvenigorodka, where to link up with the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front; The 18th tank corps and Selivanov's cavalymen entered the battle, respectively, in the bands of the 53rd and 4th guards armies, together with them to defeat the opposing enemy grouping and develop the offensive after the corps of the first echelon of the tank army.

The 20th Panzer Corps captured the city of Shpola in a night battle, and at 1300 hours on January 28 captured Zvenigorodka and met with the advance detachment of the 6th Tank Army that had approached the city.

The troops of the 4th Guards and 53rd Armies, in cooperation with the 18th Tank and 5th Guards Cavalry Corps, from January 28 to 30, broke through the enemy's barrier in the neck of the breakthrough and rushed in the direction of Shpola, simultaneously forming the inner and outer front of the encirclement.

True, the Cossacks suffered heavy losses during the breakthrough, constantly striving to attack the tanks in the cavalry formation: "The Don people rushed in the cavalry formation with sabers drawn. In the aisles between the squadrons, machine-gun carts, ready for battle, raced. On the frames of the guns, on the carts with ammunition and even on the lockers of the field kitchens, daredevils with grenades lay ready to rush at the enemy at any second. And from the right and left flanks, forest belts and ravines, the Nazis sent myriads of tracer bullets to the Cossack avalanche. The sky overhead lit up with incredible fireworks. Horses mowed down by bullets fell. People fell."

As Konev admits: "I must say that we tinkered with this corps then a lot."

But the Don people also made an indelible impression on the Germans. The former commander of the 47th Panzer Corps, General von Foreman, recalls: "Despite the losses - and I emphasize, completely regardless of the losses - the masses of Russians rushed west around noon, bypassing the German tanks, which fired at them with everything they had. It was a stunning picture, an amazing drama. I can find no other comparison - a dam broke, a huge stream rushed into the plain past our tanks, surrounded by a few grenadiers, as if past rocks rising in a seething stream. We were even more amazed when a little later the cavalry formations of three Soviet divisions rushed in close formation through our barrage. I hadn't seen anything like it in a long time — it seemed unreal."

The 1st Ukrainian Front went on the offensive on 26 January. Fighting in the breakout area

were stubborn. Especially strong fire resistance was met by the troops of the 40th and 6th tank armies, which was used in the first echelon. By the end of the day they had advanced only 2-5 km. At the same time, the losses of the 6th Panzer Army amounted to 59 tanks and self-propelled guns. The formations of the 27th Army, Lieutenant General S.G. Trofimenko managed to advance 8-12 km in a day. Three Soviet armies were opposed by three German infantry divisions.

On the second day, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, using the success of the 27th Army, advanced up to 10 km on the right flank and up to 25 km on the left flank of the breakthrough sector. The tactical defense of the enemy was broken through on the entire front. On January 28, the forward detachment of the 6th Tank Army, sent forward, reached Zvenigorodka by 1300 hours, where it joined with the 20th Tank Corps of General I.G. Lazarev.

Thus, on the fourth day of the operation, the tank armies of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts cut off all the routes connecting the Korsun-Shevchenko enemy grouping with the main forces.

In the ring were the directorates of the 11th and 42nd army corps, 4 infantry, 1 tank divisions, corps group "B", the SS "Wallonia" brigade, 3 divisions of assault guns and the regiment of the 14th, which broke through from the south directly into the "boiler". tank division, separate units of other units. The size of the encircled group, according to Soviet data, reached 80,000 people, it was armed with 1600 guns and mortars, up to 230 tanks and assault guns. According to German authors, about 56,000 soldiers and officers were surrounded.

The command of the encircled troops was taken by the commander of the 11th Army Corps, General of Artillery Wilhelm Stemmermann, who, like Paulus in his time, received Hitler's order not to leave the last section of the Dnieper.

Such a wonderful picture was caught by Manstein, who had just arrived from the Headquarters of the Fuhrer. Again it was necessary to take "fire" measures. The encirclement of a large German grouping by Soviet troops in the Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi region forced the German command to stop counterattacks east of Vinnitsa and north of Uman, and to abandon all tank divisions to save the encircled troops.

The 1st Panzer Army was ordered to withdraw General Bright's 3rd Panzer Corps from the battlefield and transfer his divisions - the 16th, 17th and "Adolf Hitler" - to the crisis area. At the first opportunity they were to be followed by the 1st Panzer Division. General Vbler was tasked with concentrating Foreman's 47th Panzer Corps near the breakthrough site. Both corps were to deliver coordinated strikes from the west and south against the Soviet troops. However, the Germans could not quickly concentrate all

assigned forces. The tank grouping of the 8th Army began to deliver counterattacks on the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front from February 1, and the strike grouping in the zone of the 1st Tank Army was assembled only by February 11th.

In the meantime, a 95-kilometer gap gaped in the German defense absolutely uncovered. Manstein was horrified to expect what, as it seemed to him, suggested itself: a powerful blow that cuts the front to the borders of Romania and leads to the destruction of the entire southern flank. However, the Russians decided to be content with little and "clung to the bag." Even after the war, German authors were perplexed:

"To this day, no satisfactory answer has been received to the question why in the winter of 1943/44 the Stavka and, in particular, Marshal Zhukov and General of the Army Konev missed a unique chance to destroy the German southern front west of the Dnieper. Overestimated the strength of the Germans? Or underestimated the situation in the bag? Whatever the reason, Konev and Zhukov opted for a less serious solution and concentrated the entire force of six, and subsequently seven armies, including two first-class tank armies and several independent tank corps, on

elimination of six and a half German divisions. An uneconomical effort and comprehensible only on the assumption that the Russians had a completely wrong idea of the German forces inside the bag. Everything indicates that the Soviet operation was based on a simple but ridiculous mistake. The Russians were obviously sure that they had surrounded the bulk of the German 8th Army, in particular its tank units, as well as the army headquarters.

The Germans calmed down only on January 31, having learned from radio interception that the enemy was mining the breakthrough.

On February 3, formations of the 27th, 4th Guards Armies and the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps formed a continuous internal encirclement front.

To create an external front, the tank armies of Rotmistrov and Kravchenko were used. In a short time they created a sufficiently strong anti-tank defense at a distance of 15-25 km from the internal front. Tank armies occupied defenses along a 50–60 km front, tank and mechanized corps 18–20 km, and tank and motorized rifle brigades 7–8 km. The 6th Tank Army was reinforced by the 47th Rifle Corps, while the 5th Guards Tank Army was reinforced by the 49th Rifle Corps, the 34th Anti-Tank Brigade, and the 5th Engineer Brigade of the RGK. The 11th anti-tank destroyer, 49th light artillery and 27th separate heavy cannon artillery brigades were also transferred to the army zone. Troops of the 40th and 53rd armies adjoined the flanks of the tank armies. A huge role was played by sappers who installed about 40,000 mines in tank-hazardous areas.

Stemmerman, in turn, was busy with the transfer of troops, the reduction of the front and the organization of all-round defense.

To destroy the encircled grouping, the 27th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the 52nd, 4th Guards Armies and the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps of the 2nd Ukrainian Front were involved - a total of 16 rifle, 3 cavalry divisions, 2 fortified areas, and as well as reinforcements. As part of the Soviet troops operating on the internal front of the encirclement, there were about 2000 guns and mortars, 138 tanks and self-propelled artillery installations. Their task was to dismember and destroy the "boiler". Almost simultaneously, fierce battles broke out both on the internal and external fronts. The Germans held firm, like a prayer, repeating the telegram from the commander of the 1st Panzer Army: "I will help you out. Hube". Therefore, when on February 8 the Soviet command presented to the headquarters



Stemmermann's ultimatum demanding surrender was rejected.

The combat journal of the 2nd Ukrainian Front noted: "... despite the fact that the encircled people daily suffer huge losses in manpower and equipment, there are no facts of demoralization and disorganization. Units are being taken prisoner, resistance is stubborn, counterattacks do not stop. This phenomenon once again emphasizes that we are still fighting with a very strong, stubborn and stable army."

By the way, in the ultimatum, officers and soldiers who stopped resistance were guaranteed life and safety, and after the end of the war - return to Germany or to any other country at the request of the prisoner of war. It also said that all those who surrendered would be kept military uniforms, insignia, orders, personal property and valuables, and senior officers and edged weapons.

The Germans did not believe these promises and rarely surrendered. Stalin, declaring the Soviet prisoners of war traitors, to the German, of course, treated no better. The Supreme Commander encouraged cruelty towards the Germans, often recommended that the generals of the prisoners "interrogate them with prejudice, and then shoot them." Thus, the execution of prisoners of war was widely practiced by Soviet troops during the Crimean

operations in 1942; executions were sanctioned by the representative of the Headquarters L.Z. Mekhlis. After the landing in Feodosia, the marines destroyed all the wounded in German hospitals. There were entire divisions, whose personnel were ordered not to be taken prisoner, the soldiers shot Soviet citizens in the service of the Wehrmacht on their own initiative.

Those who nevertheless ended up in captivity, as you know, did not go anywhere after the war. In 1945, they were slapped with 10 years in the camps, turned from prisoners of war into prisoners, and sent to restore the destroyed economy. Well, "zeks" are not entitled to orders. On November 3, 1945, Lavrenty Pavlovich signed an order to deprive the German army of prisoners of war of the right to wear insignia and distinction. 518,520 people of the former Wehrmacht and its allies who survived and died in captivity returned to Germany and "any other country" after the death of Stalin.

At the same time, even more fierce battles with large forces, trying to break through the defenses of the Soviet troops and help out the "encirclement", did not subside on the external front. The German command continuously built up forces on the external front and threw them into battle.

The grouping of two fronts on the outer front on February 3 consisted of 22 rifle divisions, 4 tank and 1 mechanized corps, which had about 150,000 people with reinforcements, 2,736 guns and mortars, 307 tanks and self-propelled guns.

To carry out the deblockade, the Germans by this time had concentrated 5 infantry, 7 tank divisions, 4 tank battalions, 3 divisions of assault guns.

"Using its superiority in tank and self-propelled guns," Grylev escalates the situation, "and also relying on a powerful tank ram of heavy Tiger tanks and Ferdinand assault guns, the enemy hoped to break through to the encircled divisions." Where does such superiority come from? But, it turns out, our scientists have proved that Manstein collected "about 1000" tanks and assault guns here! It seems that if the balance of forces were really like that, then 1000 German tanks, and even having "tigers", and under the leadership of Manstein, would "move" 307 Soviet vehicles effortlessly, even considering the field marshal's admission that

"It was again confirmed that Soviet tanks, when moving through snow or soggy soil, are superior to our tanks in terms of their cross-country ability...". Konev calls the figure more modest - 600.

The question of supplying Stemmermann's divisions became acute. The Germans: "At first ... they spent the available stocks, as well as food obtained by ruthlessly robbing the local population." At the same time, the German command was organizing the delivery of ammunition, fuel and food by air. Our aviation and anti-aircraft artillery did their best to prevent this.

But the Soviet shock groupings, far removed from their rear, found themselves in a similar situation. The beginning of February was unusually warm. Due to rain and sleet, all types of transport, including caterpillar ones, could move with great difficulty, and, as Lieutenant General D.I. Zaev, "therefore, the front command was forced to supply fuel and ammunition for the 6th tank army by PO-2 aircraft ... The personnel were fed mainly from local resources and trophies. As they joked then, they sat on the "grandmother's certificate".

In general, "the whites came - they rob, the reds came, you know, they also rob. And where should the peasant go?

Everything was mixed up, on the ground and in the air there were continuous battles.

In early February, the Germans were especially persistent in trying to break through to the encircled

troops in the zone of the 2nd Ukrainian Front in the areas of Novo-Mirgorod and Tolmach. Here they concentrated the 3rd, 11th, 13th and 14th Panzer Divisions of the 8th Army. At that time, the encircled group, which occupied the gorodishche ledge, was closest to the outer front in this very place. The German divisions went on the offensive against the 53rd and 5th Guards Tank Army, which had 173 tanks and self-propelled guns. As a result, the Soviet units were pushed back 5 km to the north. However, the counterattacks of the second echelons of the armies and the reserves that came to the rescue in time, including the 11th Guards Tank Corps of General Hetman and the 64th Guards Tank Brigade of the 1st Tank Army, the enemy was completely stopped in this direction. Almost all of our memoirists, and most importantly historians, somehow forgot about the participation in the battle of almost half of the forces of Katukov's tank army.

Soon the troops of the 52nd and 4th Guards armies liquidated the Gorodishchensk resistance center.

Then the German command shifted the center of gravity of the fighting on the outer front to the zone of the 1st Ukrainian Front, in the Rizin region. Here, General Hube concentrated the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions, the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, the 503rd and 506th Heavy Tank Battalions. On February 6, the advanced units of the 1st Panzer Division approached here, and on February 10, the entire division in full force. This grouping was supposed to break through to the encircled along the shortest path through Lysyanka to Steblev.

On February 4, the 1st Tank Army, with the help of three tank divisions, two heavy battalions, supported by an assault gun division, struck in the Rizin area. And the day before, the 8th Army resumed attacks with the forces of its three tank divisions and the 8th tank battalion in the Tolmach-Iskrennee area.

The army of General Wöhler was not successful. Hube's army managed to penetrate the defenses of the Soviet 47th Rifle Corps, which created the danger of a breakthrough.

The Soviet command took measures to localize and eliminate the enemy that had broken through. Vatutin gave the order to bring Bogdanov's 2nd Panzer Army into battle. The army, replenished with equipment, had 372 tanks and self-propelled guns in the 3rd and 16th tank corps.

At dawn on February 6, tankers attacked the enemy in cooperation with units of the 40th and 6th tank armies. With this unexpected blow, the enemy grouping was stopped, and in a number of sectors they were thrown back.

Nevertheless, the penetration into the Soviet defense was preserved. Everything indicated that the Germans were preparing to resume the offensive and for this purpose they were bringing up the 1st Panzer Division and three divisions of assault guns.

The Soviet command, in turn, took new measures to strengthen the defense. On February 8, the 8th Guards Tank Brigade of the 20th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army with the 1895th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment and one regiment of the 31st Anti-Tank Brigade was advanced to the Lysyanka area to engage in a solid all-round defense.

By 4 am on February 9, the brigade occupied the indicated line.

In addition, the 20th Tank Corps received the task of blocking the roads leading north and south from Kozatsky and Tarasovka by ambushes of tanks and artillery, the 18th Tank Corps - by ambushes of tanks to block the roads in the Topilna area, the 29th Tank Corps in the Serdegovka area .

The forces of the engineering and artillery units of the front organized anti-tank strongholds in the corridor separating the encircled enemy troops from the external front.

By the end of February 10, the enemy had completed his preparations for a new strike. In the Rizin area, the German 1st Panzer Army had a grouping of four tank divisions, two tank battalions and four assault gun divisions. 8th

the army, having regrouped the forces of the 11th, 13th and 14th tank divisions, created a strike force in the Yerka area, from where it was supposed to strike at Lysyanka.

At the same time, the command of the encircled grouping was concentrating units of two infantry divisions, a heavy tank battalion of the SS Viking division, and a brigade of the SS Wallonia into the area of Steblevka for an attack through Shenderovka on Lysyanka.

On February 11, at 11 o'clock, German troops again went over to the offensive on the outer front. Heavy fighting ensued almost along the entire length of the outer front of the encirclement. Despite the stubborn resistance of the 47th Rifle Corps, General Koll's 1st Panzer Division broke through at night into the southern part of Lysyanka.

On February 12, the troops of the encircled grouping attacked from the Steblev area to the southwest in the hope of linking up with their tank divisions. Heavy fighting ensued in this direction, often turning into hand-to-hand combat. In the zone of the 27th Army, Stemmerman's forces managed to reach the Shenderovka area, as a result of which the distance between the encircled grouping and Khube's tank divisions was reduced to 10-12 km. The Germans were helped by the lack of coordinated actions of the two headquarters, especially at the junction of fronts, where no one at all had a clear picture of the overall picture. The deputy head of the corps intelligence of the Don Corps, Major Zhuk, noted in his diary: "The roads were incredibly messed up. Mud flows over the tops. Artillery and tanks fell behind. Rescue horses. Slowly but steadily we are moving forward. At least the devil knows his mother where this "front" is now. We have already fought front to the west, to the east, to the south. Now we're heading north. And that's it - go ahead!

Stalin was dissatisfied with the way the process of liquidating the encircled German corps was proceeding. In a special telegram sent to Zhukov, he pointed out that the enemy's breakthrough from the Steblev area to Shenderovka occurred due to the following reasons:

"Firstly, there was no general plan for the destruction of the Korsun enemy grouping by the joint efforts of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts.

Secondly, the 27th Army, weak in composition, was not reinforced in a timely manner.

Thirdly, no decisive measures were taken to carry out the instructions of the Headquarters to destroy, first of all, the enemy's stem ledge, from where attempts to break through it were most likely to be expected ... "

To coordinate all these issues was the direct responsibility of the representative of the Stavka, Marshal Zhukov. To which the Supreme Commander directly pointed out to him: "I must tell you that I entrusted you with the tasks of coordinating the actions of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts, and meanwhile, from your report today, it is clear that, despite the severity of the situation, you are not sufficiently aware of environment..."

On February 12, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, despite Zhukov's objections, instructed Konev to liquidate the encircled group, and ordered Vatutin to concentrate efforts on holding the outer ring of the front. Georgy Konstantinovich understood that in this way the laurels of victory were leaving his protégé Vatutin for Konev, but he could not do anything. Soon the "coordinator" was recalled: "... Marshal of the Soviet Union Zhukov, who coordinated the actions of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts, failed to organize a clear interaction between the troops that repelled the onslaught of the enemy, and was recalled by the Stavka to Moscow." I am quoting Marshal M.V. Zakharov, former chief of staff of the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

Fulfilling the order of the Headquarters, Konev removed the 5th Guards Tank Army from the external front and redirected its corps to actions in the most critical areas: in the areas of Lysyanka and Steblev. The regrouping of the army in the conditions of slush was an extremely difficult task. Therefore, Rotmistrov ordered the corps commanders to leave all slow-moving tanks at their former lines, but without fail to transfer the 462nd anti-tank regiment to the designated areas in towns. The 49th Rifle Corps was transferred to the 53rd Army.

Here, having made a 120-kilometer march, the 11th Guards Tank Brigade arrived. The cavalry corps was withdrawn to the front reserve.

As a result of decisive measures, the situation in the Lysyanka area and near Shenderovka was strengthened. The front line around the encircled German group reached 35 km. The entire "boiler" had a diameter of no more than 12 km. On January 14, troops of the 52nd Army liberated Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi.

By February 16, it became clear that the rescue operation of the 3rd Panzer Corps had failed, General Bright's offensive bogged down ten kilometers from the target. By this time, the encircled troops occupied only three settlements - Shenderovka, Khilki and Komarovka. In this situation, Manstein ordered Stemmermann to break through to the southwest towards the 3rd Panzer Corps.

All remaining troops were drawn to the Shenderovka area. It was decided to carry out the breakthrough in three columns on a front of 4.5 km. In the first echelon they were supposed to operate: in the northern column - the 112th Infantry Division, in the center - the 72nd Infantry Division with the 105th Grenadier Regiment, in the southern column - the SS Panzer Division "Viking" and the SS motorized brigade "Wallonia". The first echelon was followed by the remnants

other divisions. Artillery, after the last ammunition was used up, was planned to be abandoned. The 88th and 57th divisions covered the retreat. Staff documents and personal belongings were destroyed. Non-transportable wounded were left with medical personnel at the mercy of the enemy.

The Soviet information bureau came up with an even scarier tale:

"...Hitler, after the failure of attempts to save the encircled Germans, gave the German troops who fell into the "bag" another order, in which he demanded that the encircled German soldiers and officers sacrifice themselves ... The mentioned order of Hitler contained a direct directive about that surrounded German soldiers and officers commit suicide if their situation becomes hopeless ... Wounded soldiers and officers, by order of the German command, were killed and burned.

Front correspondent Boris Polevoy, who was very far from military affairs, spoke authoritatively about the German plan in his diary: In fact, wouldn't it have been easier to disperse these masses, spread out, melt into darkness, disperse into tens and hundreds of small groups, which in the overwhelming majority could seep through the barriers without much difficulty, like water through a sieve? Often our large units, which were surrounded in the first period of the war, did this with success. However, only soldiers armed with not only good equipment, but also a lofty idea could act in this way. Stemmermann knew his soldiers, he knew that they were disciplined and steadfast when an officer stood behind them and when they were under the hypnosis of an order. But he probably also knew that when he dispersed the remnants of his units, depriving them of the officer's pistol at the back of their heads and the terrible ghost of the Gestapo behind their backs, these units would turn into a herd and the soldiers would raise their hands.

Oh well. We remember how in 1941 our "large units" "successfully" emerged from the encirclement in "small groups". For example, Vlasov, Kirponos, Kulik, who abandoned their troops or abandoned by the troops. Entire fronts, armed with a "high idea", melted like water in the sand, and about 3 million were captured. Human.

By midnight, a blizzard broke out, visibility dropped to the limit. At that moment, the entire mass of encircled troops north of Komarovka fell on the 180th Infantry Division of the 27th Army without firing a shot, broke through its positions and reached the second line

defenses southeast of Petrovsky to the positions of the 5th Guards Airborne Division. Konev threw all his reserves into the battle: maneuver groups, Rotmistrov's tankers and Selivanov's cavalry, who struck from the flanks. The tanks operated with headlights on, the Cossacks rushed across the field with swords drawn, artillery fired point-blank, hand-to-hand fights flared up everywhere,

"There was no time to take prisoners." The columns crumbled, the parts mixed up.

"In this frenzied race," recalls a member of the Walloon SS brigade, "cars overturned, throwing wounded people to the ground. A wave of Soviet tanks overtook the first vehicles and captured more than half of the convoy; this wave rolled over the wagons, destroying them one by one like matchboxes, crushing wounded people and dying horses ... We had a moment's respite while the tanks got stuck and tried to get out of the pile of hundreds of trucks crushed by their tracks.

A similar description is given by an eyewitness from the 11th Guards Tank Brigade: "A few minutes later, the tanks of the brigade, followed by cavalymen who had come from nowhere, rushed at the enemy. Crashing into the German columns, the tanks crushed, and the cavalymen cut down the Nazis ... The whole path from Komarovka to Lysyanka was completely littered with the corpses of German soldiers and officers, broken guns and mortars, a mass of abandoned vehicles and other military equipment.

The battle formations of both sides were so intertwined that it was difficult to figure out where ours were and where our enemies were. The Germans, under continuous fire, pursued by tanks, stubbornly rushed south, to the treasured river called Rotten Tikich on the outer front of the encirclement.

"At dawn," says Soviet history, "the infantry and cavalry completed the defeat of the enemy grouping ... Only small groups of German soldiers and officers managed to escape and reach the Lysyanka area, but they were completely demoralized."

In Manstein's memoirs, the situation looks somewhat different: "At 01:25 on the night of February 16-17, the joyful news came that the first contact between the corps emerging from the encirclement and the forward units of the 3rd shopping mall had been established. The enemy, who was between them, was literally crushed. On February 28, we learned that 30,000-32,000 people came out of the cauldron ... taking into account the low number of troops, this amounted to most of the bayonets.

Tippelskirch says the same thing: "... the surrounded corps had to, abandoning all heavy weapons, artillery and a large amount of equipment, make their way to their troops with the last desperate throw. Only 30,000 people left the encirclement." Naturally, these defeated divisions were not combat-ready and were sent to rear for restoration.

German sources are unanimous in describing the events, while there are discrepancies in the Soviet sources, the timing is especially alarming. For example, Manstein and other authors report that the breakthrough began around midnight and by half past one contact was made with the encircled. Konev claims that he had previously concentrated tank and cavalry corps on the flanks of the proposed breakthrough, which received the command to advance between 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning, "i.e. That is, to the moment when the Nazis began to approach our forward defense positions. But the former head of intelligence of the 4th Guards Army, General T.F. Vorontsov reports that the Cossacks struck only at dawn, that is, about 6 hours, and Rotmistrov's tank corps attacked "a little later." The same Vorontsov blurts out: "... as it turned out later, the generals and senior officers shamefully abandoned their soldiers at the beginning of the breakthrough. On armored personnel carriers, under the cover of several surviving tanks, as soon as they managed to make a small gap in the first line of our battle formations, they rushed to the south and fled to the Lysyanka area before dawn.

To be honest, not very similar to the fighting German generals. General

During the breakthrough, Stemmerman followed with the rearguard, personally led the officer company, composed of the headquarters of the 11th Corps, and died in battle. Boris Polevoy, who came to look at the corpse, wrote in his diary: "Be that as it may, he did not escape by plane, as the senior officers of his headquarters did, he did not leave the soldier. He stayed with them and died a soldier's death." It would be necessary to choose just one thing: they fled in an armored personnel carrier, flew away in an airplane, held a "gun to the back of the head" or died a soldier's death?

One can recall another example: how General Petrov and Admiral Oktyabrsky, their headquarters and division commanders, fled from Sevastopol, abandoning their troops, which did not prevent them from receiving the title of Hero of the Soviet Union "for skillful leadership ... for

courage, courage and heroism in the fight against the Nazi invaders.

In addition, in front of the armored personnel carriers, as we know, three DIVISIONS "ran to Lysyanka".

It turns out that the beginning of the breakthrough was nevertheless missed, the Soviet tankers and cavalry were already hitting the "tails" of the columns, and the main part of the Korsun group escaped destruction, although they lost almost all artillery, vehicles and many tanks. The seriously wounded, who did not have time to "kill and burn", also had to be abandoned. They made up the bulk of the prisoners.

Naturally, all the commanders reported to Konev that not a single German soldier had broken through in their sector, and Konev himself reported the same. And who will check? After all, the enemy broke through not into our rear, but into his own. The commander of the SS Viking division, Gruppenführer Gille, who received the Cross from Hitler for this breakthrough, according to Konev, either took off by plane before the start of the battle, "or crawled through the front line, dressed in civilian clothes." Together with him, apparently, the commander of the 42nd Corps, General Lieb, the commander of the 72nd Infantry Division, Colonel Hon, and, for example, 632 soldiers of the Walloon Brigade or 219 people from the 105th Grenadier Regiment "crawled through". More than 3,000 soldiers and officers were brought out by the commander of the 57th Infantry Division, General Trovitz. Most of the 88th Infantry Division of General Rittberg managed to escape.

Stalin guessed that things were not clean, but the battle of Korsun-Shevchenkovsky had already been declared "a new Stalingrad on the banks of the Dnieper", an outstanding victory was trumpeted to the whole world and a salute from 224 guns was thundered.

By the way, the tradition of celebrating military victories with artillery salute was laid down by Peter the Great. Comrade Stalin revived this custom after the victory at the Kursk Bulge, when the liberation of Orel and Belgorod was marked by 12 volleys from 124 guns. The number of volleys was explained by the presence of only 1500 blank shots in the warehouses. Subsequently, three categories of salutes were established: the first - 24 volleys from 324 guns, the second - 20 volleys from 224 guns and the third - 12 volleys from 124 guns. The Korsun victory was celebrated in the second category.

It's time to count the trophies and hand out the rewards. The official "History of the Second World War" reports that the Germans lost surrounded by 55,000 people killed, more than 18,000 prisoners, a large amount of equipment. About 3,000 more soldiers and officers were taken out by transport planes. From here, the initial figure of the 80,000th encircled group "dances out". Another 27,000 killed, up to 1,500 captured, more than 600 tanks were chalked up to the troops holding the outer front of the encirclement. Total: the Germans lost in the Korsun-Shevchenko operation 82,000 people killed and about 20,000 prisoners.

The troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front and personally to its commander were declared gratitude from the Supreme. General of the Army Konev for the skillful leadership of the troops on February 20 was awarded the military rank of "Marshal of the Soviet Union", Rotmistrov

was awarded the title of Marshal of the Armored Forces.

True, according to archival data, for the entire period from January 1 to March 1, 1944, the Red Army captured only 15,351 enemy soldiers and officers on all fronts. According to Müller-Hillebrand, for the whole of February, again, on all fronts, the German ground forces lost 41,200 people killed.

The German author directly calls the Soviet calculations "funny

juggling" with numbers: "The daily report of the 8th Army on the evening of February 11, 1944, estimates the personnel of the two encircled corps, including Russian volunteers, at 56,000 people. Of these, a total of 2188 wounded were left behind. About 35,000 people, according to the information of the chiefs of staff of the encircled corps, left the encirclement and were registered by reception centers as arrivals. Combat logs of divisions and regiments also confirm these data. Their average losses are 20-30 percent. Thus, the list of losses in Cherkassy includes 18,800 people ... This does not detract from the victory of the Russians. Its significance lies in the destruction of the combat power of six and a half German divisions. Six and a half divisions have lost all their weapons ... This means that six and a half divisions are lost for further operations.

Of course, this was a major victory, which had operational and strategic significance. The enemy was finally thrown back from the Dnieper in its middle reaches. The elimination of the Kanev ledge and the grouping operating in it eliminated the threat to the flanks of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts and at the same time ensured freedom of maneuver along the front; Soviet troops liberated an important railway roadway on the right bank of the Dnieper: Fastov - Belaya Tserkov - Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi - Znamenko - Dnepropetrovsk along its entire length. The reduction of the front line made it possible to release a large number of troops and use them for subsequent hostilities. All this created favorable conditions for the deployment of the further offensive of the Soviet troops to the Southern Bug and the Dniester.

#### RIVNO-LUTSK OPERATION

Simultaneously with the defeat of the Korsun-Shevchenko grouping, the 1st Ukrainian Front carried out the Rovno-Lutsk operation with the right wing in order to capture the Rovno-Lutsk-Shepetovka region and take an advantageous line for a subsequent attack from the north on the flank and rear of Army Group South.

The main role was assigned to the 13th Army under the command of Lieutenant General N.P. Pukhov, which included three rifle, 1st and 6th guards cavalry corps. The army dealt the main blow with the forces of the 76th Rifle Corps and two cavalry corps from the Sarny area to Rovno and Lutsk, bypassing them from the northwest. On the left flank, the 24th Rifle Corps was to advance around Rovno from the south and southwest. The right-flank 77th Rifle Corps had the task of covering the right flank of the army in the Stolin region, and with the rest of the forces to advance to the Goryn River.

60th Army Lieutenant General I.D. Chernyakhovsky included four rifle, 4th guards and 25th tank corps. The army dealt the main blow with the forces of the 18th Guards Rifle Corps to Shepetovka. The 23rd Rifle Corps, adjoining the 13th Army, was to capture the Ostrog-Slavuta line. The remaining corps fettered the opposing enemy forces, preventing a possible strike by the enemy grouping on the left flank of the army.

Both armies had 19 rifle divisions, two cavalry and two tank corps. They had a total of 2811 guns and mortars, 140 tanks and self-propelled guns. They were opposed by six infantry divisions of the 13th and 59th

army corps under the command of Generals Haufler and Schulz. South of Shepetovka was the 48th Tank Corps, consisting of three tank divisions.

The operation was carried out in hard-to-reach wooded and swampy terrain, in a number of areas impassable for troops. Mud and high water made offensive operations even more difficult. But these conditions are the command of the front



used to be successful. The Germans, due to a lack of forces and due to the conditions of the terrain, did not have a continuous defense front between Sarny and Shepetovka. Only the main roads were intercepted by separate strongholds; there were gaps between them, which were patrolled in small groups. In addition, a strike from the area west of Sarny ensured surprise, since the enemy, given the severe swampy terrain, poor road network and mudslides, believed that large masses of Soviet troops were impossible in this area. Under these conditions, the Soviet command made the main bet on the cavalry.

The operation plan also provided for the fact that the rivers in this area flow in the meridional direction. Therefore, it was important to eliminate the need for their sequential forcing. It was supposed to maneuver along the rivers.

Simultaneously with the preparation of a strong blow from the Sarnov region to the flank and rear of the Lutsk-Rovno grouping, strikes from the front were envisaged in order to pin down the enemy and deprive him of freedom of maneuver.

Partisan formations and detachments of S.A. were operating in the area of the upcoming hostilities. Kovpak, A.F. Fedorova, M.I. Naumova, D.N. Medvedev, A.N. Saburova. When planning the operation, the headquarters of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the 13th Army coordinated the actions of troops and partisans with the Ukrainian headquarters of the partisan movement.

The operation began on 27 January. On the right flank of the 13th Army, the 1st and 6th Guards Cavalry Corps crossed the front line during the night of January 27 and advanced to the areas of Vladimirets, Ostrovets, Politsy, and Sedlisko by morning. Here they stopped for a day, preparing to move to the border of the Styr River.

Parts of the 76th Rifle Corps on the morning of January 27 broke through the enemy defenses on their right flank and moved forward 5-7 km. The 24th Rifle Corps successfully crossed Goryn on the entire front and advanced from 4 to 6 km. His 287th Rifle Division occupied Ostrog on the very first day of the offensive.

The troops of Chernyakhovsky, with the forces of the 18th Guards and 23rd Rifle Corps, advanced on the right flank to the line of the Goryn River and approached the approaches to Shepetovka from the north and east.

On the second day, the cavalry corps, having resumed their movement to the west, on the night of January 28 reached the line of the Styr River in the area of Rafalovka, Czartorysk, and forward detachments crossed the river in these areas.

The German command was concerned about the precarious situation on the northern flank of the 4th Panzer Army, although it still had no idea about the goals and scale of the Soviet offensive. It considered the main task to strengthen the defense of the main nodes and roads and crossings on the Styr River in the Kovel direction. For this purpose, the motorized division of the SS "Feldherrnhalle" was urgently advanced to the Stolin region and to the south, reserve units from Kovel to the Manevichi region, units of the 19th Hungarian division to Rovno, the 7th Panzer Division to the Shepetovka region and to the Yampol region - 21st Hungarian Division.

It became clear that the cavalymen would not reach Kovel.

On the night of January 28, Vatutin instructed the commander of the 13th Army to turn the corps to attack Lutsk and Rovno. In accordance with this, General Pukhov ordered the 1st Cavalry Corps from the occupied area to advance south and, acting along the eastern bank of the Styr River, capture Lutsk by the end of January 31. The 6th Guards Cavalry Corps received the task of striking in the direction of Klevan, attacking Rovno from

northwest and assist the rifle corps advancing from the front in defeating the Rovno enemy grouping.

Since the cavalry corps had to leave the Rafalovka-Chartoriysk area, the divisions of the 77th Rifle Corps were ordered to move there.

The maneuver was carried out covertly. The German command still had no idea about the number of Soviet troops and the scope of their actions. It mistook the movement of columns through the forests in its rear for a raid by partisan formations.

On the morning of January 29, the 1st and 6th Guards Cavalry Corps, by order of the commander of the 13th Army, turned south, striking in the rear of the enemy group operating in the Lutsk-Rivne region.

The offensive took place in extremely difficult conditions: the troops moved along swampy forest roads. People walked waist-deep in icy water, carrying ammunition, mortars, dragging guns. The horses were exhausted.

On January 31, units of the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps under the command of Lieutenant General V.K. Baranov went to the Kivertsev area, and the 6th Guards Cavalry Corps, Lieutenant General S.V. Sokolova took possession of Klevan. With access to the Kivertsy-Klevan region, the highway and railway connecting Rovno with Lutsk and Kovel were cut, and the enemy troops operating in the Lutsk and Rovno region were separated. The rear of the entire Lutsk-Rivne group was under threat.

At this moment, the German command had already received a more complete picture of the situation and began to take desperate measures to save the situation. All police and rear units were sent to strengthen the defense of Lutsk, Rivne, Zdolbuniv, Shepetovka. The 118th division of assault guns was transferred to Lutsk to reinforce the 19th infantry division of the Hungarians and the German garrison located there.

To prevent the maneuver of Soviet troops from the Rovno region to the northwest, cavalry and security regiments and a police team were advanced. Moving along the road without outposts, these regiments fell into an ambush organized by the 6th Cavalry Corps and were defeated.

Baranov's corps, developing an offensive from Kivertsy to the southwest, broke into Lutsk on the night of February 2 and completely captured the city by morning.

Sokolov's corps attacked Dubno with one division, and with the other two - to the south-west, in the rear of the enemy's Rovno grouping. On February 2, Soviet troops liberated Rivne, the administrative center of the Reichskommissariat of Ukraine. Gauleiter Koch, whom the legendary liquidator Nikolai Kuznetsov hunted so stubbornly and unsuccessfully, of course, got out of the city in advance, ordering the police units subordinate to him to hold out to the last. The remnants of the garrison knocked out of the city partly hastily retreated through the forests to the south-west, and partly along the only road they had left to the south, towards Zdolbunov, pursued by the 8th cavalry division. On the night of February 3, formations of the 24th Rifle Corps captured this city as well.

On February 9, fighting began for Dubno. The Soviet command pulled up the 25th tank corps, which had 40 tanks, to this area (the rest were lost in the battles for Shepetovka). The enemy, to reinforce the retreating troops of the 13th Army Corps, transferred the 7th Panzer Division near Dubno from Shepetovka (it also came from Shepetovka, but retained up to 100 combat vehicles). Attempts by the Soviet troops to capture Dubno were unsuccessful. On February 14, the troops of the 6th Guards Cavalry, 24th Tank and 25th Rifle Corps went on the defensive. Advance for

Styr failed. There was nothing to think about Kovel.

From the very beginning of the operation, a tense struggle unfolded for Shepetivka -

a major railway junction and an important stronghold of the enemy's defense. The 291st and 96th Infantry Divisions were defending in this area. All the nearest settlements and the outskirts of the city itself were well fortified by the Germans.

As already mentioned, the troops of the 23rd, 18th Guards and 15th Rifle Corps, having gone on the offensive on January 27, advanced 8-10 km during the first and second days of the operation.

The enemy, feeling a threat to their positions in Shepetovka, pulled up the 7th Panzer Division from the reserve on the night of January 28. At 1300 hours on February 28, the 7th tank and

parts

The 291st Infantry Division launched a counterattack, pressed the troops of the 18th Guards Rifle Corps, occupying Sudilkov. By the end of the day, the 25th Tank Corps was transferred to reinforce the 18th Rifle Corps. The enemy was stopped.

During January 28 - February 9, the troops of the right flank of the 60th Army fought local battles and prepared to resume the offensive against Shepetovka. In connection with the departure of the 25th Tank Corps to the zone of the 13th Army, the 280th Rifle Division arrived to reinforce the 18th Guards Rifle Corps; the 4th Guards Tank Corps was also regrouped in its lane.

To ensure a breakthrough in the zone of the 18th Guards Corps, a fairly strong grouping of artillery was concentrated, which made it possible to create a density of up to 65 guns and mortars per 1 km of the front.

The assault began at dawn on 10 February.

Formations of the 23rd Rifle Corps by 1700 advanced to 15-20 km and reached the Pluzhnoye area, bypassing Shepetovka from the west. This largely contributed to the success of the 18th Guards and 4th Tank Corps, which captured the enemy garrison of Shepetovka from two sides and, after heavy fighting on February 11, completely captured the city. The ensuing German counterattacks were repulsed.

With the release of the 60th and 13th armies to the Manevichi-Lutsk-Shepetovka line, "the goal of the operation was basically achieved."

The troops of the right wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front defeated the enemy and even more deeply covered the northern flank of Army Group South. Coming out of the wooded swampy area, they took advantageous positions for the development of the offensive in the direction of Kovel. The large highway and railway junctions recaptured from the enemy - Rivne, Zdolbunov, Shepetovka - improved the conditions for maneuvering forces and were of great importance for supplying troops in organizing a further offensive.

In anticipation of the development of active events in the Kovel direction, on February 17, the Headquarters decided to create a new 2nd Belorussian Front at the junction of the Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts.

## NIKOPOLSKO-KRIVOROZH OPERATION

An important link in the winter offensive in Right-Bank Ukraine was the Nikopol-Krivoy Rog operation, carried out by the forces of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian

fronts.

By the end of 1943, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front under the command of General of the Army R.Ya. Malinovsky entrenched at the turn of Veseliye Terny - Tokmakovka - Belenky. The front included the 8th guards, 6th, 46th, 17th air armies and 23rd

th Panzer Corps - a total of 19 rifle divisions, | tank corps, | separate tank brigade, 10 tank and self-propelled artillery regiments - 337,000 Human.

The troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front of General of the Army F.I. Tolbukhin as part of the 2nd and 3rd Guards, 5th shock, 28th, 51st, 8th air armies,

2nd and 4th Guards Mechanized, 19th Tank and 4th Guards Cavalry Corps - a total of 38 rifle, 3 cavalry divisions, 2 mechanized, | tank, | cavalry corps, 3 tank, 1 motorized rifle brigade, 6 tank and self-propelled artillery regiments - 550,200 people. Of these, 10 rifle divisions of the 51st Army blocked the Crimea.

The German command attached great importance to the retention of Nikopol and Krivoy Rog, an economically important region of manganese and iron ore mining. In addition, Hitler planned to use this bridgehead to attack the Crimea and restore land communications with the 17th Army. The Germans took vigorous measures to complete the construction of defensive lines as soon as possible.

In front of the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts, the first defensive line of the enemy had three rows of trenches and trenches, surrounded by wire fences and covered with minefields. All heights and settlements were well fortified. Lines were being prepared in the operational depth - along the Dnieper and on the river Kamenka.

In the area of Krivoy Rog and Nikopol, the 6th field army operated under the command of Colonel General K. Hollidt. The army, as you know, was destroyed in February 1943, and in March it was re-formed. With this in mind, many authors see a certain predestination of its defeats at the last stage of the war, mentioning a certain "spirit of Stalingrad" that hovered over the army. The defeat of the Wehrmacht was indeed already predetermined. But the strange magic of coincidences: the Soviet 6th Army also acted against Nikopol, twice perishing in the Uman and Barvenkovsky boilers.

The Soviet troops operating in this area were faced with the task of defeating the Krivoy Rog-Nikopol enemy grouping, eliminating the Nikopol bridgehead and pushing the enemy troops back across the Ingulets and Southern Bug rivers.

They tried to do this back in November 1943, but a number of frontal attacks undertaken did not lead to the desired result. As soon as Soviet troops penetrated the enemy's defenses, he immediately launched counterattacks and restored the situation. "The Nikopol bridgehead," wrote Marshal S. Biryuzov, "was a real disaster for us. Hanging over our right flank, it seemed to bifurcate the forces of the 4th Ukrainian Front. The troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front also tried to break through from the north to Apostolov three times and "washed themselves with blood" three times. The 24th Panzer Division in these battles chalked up 290 destroyed Soviet

tanks.

Interestingly, military strategists on both sides of the front equally assessed

operational futility of the Nikopol bridgehead. Almost at the same time that Manstein was persuading Hitler to withdraw troops from here, shorten the line and thereby strengthen the northern flank of Army Group South, Marshal Vasilevsky reported his thoughts to Headquarters:

"Under the conditions of this situation, it is doubtful that the enemy would continue serious resistance in the bend of the Dnieper, and, consequently, on the Nikopol bridgehead.

Successful actions during the first half of the day today by the weak left wing of Chuikov and from the bridgehead of Shlemin's troops confirm the beginning of the withdrawal of enemy troops from the area west of Tokmakovka. In the near future, apparently, it is necessary to expect the withdrawal of enemy troops from the Nikopol bridgehead.

The enemy, by leaving the territory in the bend of the Dnieper, and consequently, by reducing the front by retreating beyond the river. Ingulets, and perhaps beyond the river. Southern Bug, will try to free part of its forces, and above all tank divisions, in order to throw them into the Zhmerinka-Pervomaisk area against Nikolaev and Stepin (Vatutin and

Konev. — V.B. )".

On the basis of his own conclusions, Vasilevsky proposed to immediately start pursuing the enemy, and on the left wing of the 4th Ukrainian Front, prepare and strike with the forces of four armies along the Southern Bug to Pervomaisk. On January 31, the Headquarters approved this plan, ordering the simultaneous launch of an offensive against the Crimea.

However, events developed somewhat differently than expected. The Germans were not going to leave the Zaporozhye bend and the Nikopol bridgehead, but, on the contrary, received their order "Not a step back!"

It became clear after three days. The directive of the Stavka to Vasilevsky and Tolbukhin stated: "The regrouping of forces planned by you from the Nikopol bridgehead on 6.1 implies the liquidation of the named bridgehead by this date. Meanwhile, the results of the offensive operations of the 4th Ukrainian Front against Nikopol do not give grounds for such an assumption.

We had to fight for Nikopol.

On January 10-12, 1944, the troops of both fronts launched an offensive. The 3rd Ukrainian Front dealt the main blow with the forces of the 8th Guards and 46th Armies in the Apostolic direction, and the 4th Ukrainian Front, with the forces of the 3rd Guards, 5th Shock and 28th Armies, attacked the enemy in the Nikopol bridgehead.

Heavy fighting, which lasted for five days, did not give decisive success. Malinovsky's troops wedged into the defense for 6-8 km, but could not break through it. Tolbukhin's results were even miserable.

On January 17, the Soviet command decided to stop the attacks and begin more thorough preparations for the offensive. On the same day, the Military Council of the 3rd Ukrainian Front sent a plan of operation to the Supreme High Command, which, in principle, did not differ from the previous one. At the same time, at the suggestion of Marshal Vasilevsky, the Headquarters strengthened the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which was assigned the main role. The 37th Army from the 2nd Ukrainian Front (6 rifle divisions), the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps from the 4th Ukrainian Front and the 31st Guards Rifle Corps from the Headquarters reserve (3 divisions) were transferred to its structure. The front in January received 64 tanks, a significant amount of ammunition and fuel.

In accordance with the general plan of the operation, General Malinovsky decided to deliver the main blow with the forces of the 46th Army, Lieutenant General V.V. Glagolev, 8th Guards Army Colonel General V.I. Chuikov and the 4th Guards Stalingrad Mechanized Corps, Lieutenant General T.I. Tanaschishin from the Vladimirovka area to Apostolovo, Kamenka, go to the Dnieper and, in cooperation with the 4th Ukrainian Front, encircle and destroy the enemy grouping in the area of the Nikopol bridgehead. Both armies broke through the defenses in a section of 21 km, where a density of 140 guns and mortars, 9 tanks and self-propelled guns per 1 km was created. 37th Army Lieutenant General M.N. Sharokhin and the 6th Army, Lieutenant General I.T. Shlemin was to inflict auxiliary blows: the first - on Krivoy Rog, the second - on Nikopol. The offensive of the troops was supported by the 17th Air Army of Lieutenant General V.A. Vessel.

Troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front - 3rd Guards Army, Lieutenant General D.D. Lelyushenko, 5th Shock Army Lieutenant General V.D. Tsvetaev and the 28th Army, Lieutenant General A.A. Grechkin, with the support of the 8th Air Army, Lieutenant General T.T. Khryukin - was to advance against the Nikopol bridgehead. In the band of the 5th shock army, it was planned to use the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps of Lieutenant General K.V. Sviridov.

The strikes of the troops of both fronts were supposed to lead to the crushing of the enemy defense, deprive the enemy of the opportunity to maneuver his reserves and ensure the destruction of him in parts.

Thus, the operation involved 51 rifle divisions, 2 mechanized corps, 2 separate tank, 1 motorized rifle brigade, 6 separate tank regiments - 705,000 people, 8048 guns and mortars, 238 tanks and self-propelled guns, 1333 combat aircraft. In the reserve of the fronts were 2 more tank, 1 cavalry corps, tank and motorized rifle brigades, 2 separate tank and 2 self-propelled artillery regiments.

By the beginning of February, the troops of the 6th German army, defending in the area of Nikopol and Krivoy Rog, consisted of 17 infantry, 6th and 23rd tank, 16th motorized divisions, 8 divisions of assault guns - 540,000 people, 2,416 guns and mortars, 327 tanks and assault guns. Of these, 8 infantry divisions and 3 divisions of assault guns, united in the Scherner task force, occupied the Nikopol bridgehead.

The 6th Army was supported by the 1st Aviation Corps of the 4th Air Fleet.

And again, "in terms of tanks, the advantage was on the side of the enemy."

I'll die, but I won't understand why two German tank divisions have an "advantage" in tanks over four Soviet corps, if the first was supposed to have 125, and the second 250 combat vehicles? Of course, there was no need to talk about a full staff during continuous battles. So Manstein confirms that in the winter of 1944, German divisions had an average of just over 30 serviceable tanks. For six months from July 1943 to January 1944, Army Group South received only 872 tanks and assault guns. And the four Ukrainian fronts for six months have the luxury of losing 1,400-1,500 combat vehicles every month, and at the same time they are "inferior" all the time. And in this sector of the war, even according to Soviet data, the German 23rd Panzer Division had less than 60 tanks, and the Soviet 4th Guards Mech Corps had 120. The Germans had one "tiger" battalion, and only in the 46th Army there were three separate tank regiments. So where does the "advantage on the side of the enemy" come from?

Manstein specifically described the state of the 9th and 23rd Panzer Divisions at the end of January: "Both divisions by that time had only 5 serviceable tanks! The moment must finally come when the brave troops, as a result of

continuous overvoltage will exhaust their strength. And since the groups of "great scientists" fed by the Institute of Military History of the Ministry of Defense and the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU lie directly to my eyes, I increasingly believe the "unlucky Nazi".

The offensive of Malinovsky's troops began on the morning of January 30 with strikes by the 37th and 6th armies in auxiliary directions.

The troops of General Sharokhin broke through the defenses on the 8-kilometer front and moved forward 3-4 km. The Germans, mistaking the auxiliary strike of the 37th Army for the start of the offensive of the main forces, on the very first day in this sector brought their reserves into battle - the 9th and 23rd tank divisions. By evening, the fighting here reached its highest tension. Our units had to repel fierce counterattacks, the divisions suffered heavy losses.

The 6th Guards Army could not advance. Nevertheless, the distracting task of the army was completed. Remembering this day, the former commander of the 82nd Rifle Corps, Lieutenant General P.G. Kuznetsov writes: "The fight obviously didn't go well. Reporting to the commander, I was nervous.

"Don't worry, it's for the best," he reassured me.

All day I did not understand why the commander regarded the situation so optimistically. Enemy tanks appeared one after another, and infantry arrived. The resistance of the enemy increased every hour. And the commander assures that this is for the best. What's the matter? In the evening, I got nervous and did not achieve the tasks of the day from the divisions, I returned to my headquarters.

And the next day, from the area west of Novonikolaevka, the 46th and 8th Guards armies delivered the main blow. In stubborn battles, the enemy's defenses were broken through, and the German 16th motorized, 123rd and 46th infantry divisions, which fell under attack from fifteen Soviet divisions, suffered heavy losses and began to retreat. At 4 pm on February 1, the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps was introduced into the battle, which captured a number of settlements during a night attack. The motorized division of Count von Schwerin was completely defeated. An entry appeared in the combat log of the 6th German army: "The 16th motorized division, exhausted in continuous battles, having lost most of its weapons and vehicles, broke up into separate groups ..."

General Hollidt, realizing that the main blow was inflicted on the Apostolic direction, transferred tank divisions from the 37th Army zone against the main grouping, when it had already broken through the defenses. The commander of Army Group South also had to return the 24th Panzer Division halfway there, which had previously been sent to reinforce the troops of the 8th Army, which were being concentrated to release the Korsun Shevchenko group.

The planned counterattack by the forces of the 9th and 23rd Panzer Divisions on the right flank of the 4th Mechanized Corps was belated. While the German tanks were crawling through the impassable mud to the Novoukrainka deployment line, the latter was already in the hands of Soviet tankers, and the T-34s, building on success, reached the next defensive line along the southwestern bank of the Kamenka River. Rifle units successfully repelled counterattacks, performing incredible feats. Colonel V.A. Krylov, describing the battle of the 4th Guards Rifle Division for the village of Sofiyivka, inspiredly narrates as follows: "One after another, our guns fell silent. There were no shells ... the soldiers let the tanks approach their positions and began to throw grenades at them. The grenades are gone. And the tanks, heavily tossing and turning, continued to iron the positions of the regiment. Then the most daring climbed onto the Nazi machines and began to clog the viewing slots with dirt (!). According to the political officer, the soldiers of the 3rd

Guards regiment threw grenades and mud at 18 enemy tanks.

On February 2, Hitler, dissatisfied with the fact that Manstein was pulling divisions from the Dnieper bend to the north, transferred the 6th Army to Army Group A. But even Kleist could do little. All of his reserves consisted of one training infantry division.

By February 5, formations of the 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced 45-60 km and captured the Apostolovo railway junction. The right-flank divisions of the 8th Guards Army, together with the tankers, captured Kamenka and Sholokhova, creating a threat of encirclement of the 17th Army Corps of General Kreising (five divisions) in the area of Marganets - Nikopol. The threat of losing the escape routes forced Holldt to begin withdrawing troops from here to the southwest along the right bank of the Dnieper.

The 6th German Army was cut into two parts.

From the Apostolovo area, Glagolev's troops continued to develop an offensive to the west towards the Ingulets River, and the Chuikovites, with the support of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, sought to reach the Dnieper in order to completely cut off the Nikopol group.

On January 31, the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front began active operations. At 4 o'clock in the morning, the 50th Rifle Division of the 5th Shock Army knocked the enemy down from the occupied line and advanced to a depth of 1.5 km. By 12 noon, the 3rd Guards and 28th Armies went on the offensive.

From the very beginning, the fighting took on a tense character. The Germans tried to keep the bridgehead behind them at all costs and put up stubborn resistance. However, 23 Soviet divisions, with strikes in different directions, broke the defenses of 8 enemy divisions. At 15 o'clock in the band of the 5th shock army, the 2nd guards mechanized corps was introduced into the battle. By the end of the day, the troops of General Tsvetaev

advanced 7 km, and the tankers - up to 11 km.

The enemy, under the blows of the Soviet troops, began to retreat to the crossings across the Dnieper at Bolshaya Lepetikha and Nikopol. Soviet artillery concentrated fire on these crossings, they were continuously bombed and fired upon by aircraft. As a result, the organized withdrawal of enemy troops was disrupted. However, the Germans managed to hold back the offensive of the Soviet troops on the bridgeheads and withdraw their divisions to the northern coast.

On February 8, the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front completely cleared the bridgehead from the enemy and, together with the 6th Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, liberated Nikopol. Sviridov's mechanized corps was withdrawn to the front reserve.

With the loss of Nikopol, the German troops operating in the area lost their last major stronghold and faced disaster. Only one narrow corridor remained for the retreat of the 17th and 4th army corps. Its width from the Dnieper to the front edge of the tank brigades of General Tanaschishin, which entered the area of Sholokhov and Perevizsky farms, was only 6-7 km, and it was shot through with all calibers of artillery and mortars. For this corridor to the west of the city, exceptionally intense battles unfolded. The Germans continuously counterattacked, trying at all costs to keep a narrow strip of land behind them and withdraw the remnants of the group defeated near Nikopol along it. Covering themselves with part of the forces from the attacks of the 6th Army of General Shlemin, they threw their main forces against the 8th Guards, which sought to cut off their escape routes to the west by accessing the Dnieper floodplains. To repel the onslaught of Chuikov's troops in the areas of Perevizskoye and Maryinskoye, General Sherner concentrated parts of six infantry divisions that had withdrawn from the Nikopol bridgehead



and the remnants of General Jolasse's 9th Panzer. The 24th Panzer Division urgently arrived here, the 560th separate battalion of "tigers" was being pulled up.

On February 11] the enemy, with the forces of two tank and four infantry divisions, delivered a strong counterattack from the east and southeast to Apostolovo, at the junction of the 8th Guards and 46th armies. The few Soviet units operating in this direction were forced to withdraw. By the end of the day, the Germans managed to advance 8-10 km. There was a threat of their capture of Apostolov. Malinovsky urgently moved a rifle division and two anti-tank artillery regiments from the reserve. At the same time, four more divisions and the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps were regrouped in the threatened direction.

The counterattacks of the German troops were repulsed. But the forces of the 8th Guards Army, operating southwest and south of Apostolovo, were significantly weakened. The troops were short of ammunition. The 4th Guards Mechanized Corps, which suffered significant losses, had to be withdrawn to the reserve on February 10.

Thus, Sherner did not allow Soviet troops to reach the Dnieper floodplains and kept behind him the road that runs along the Dnieper from Nikopol to Duchany. Units of five German infantry divisions retreated along it under continuous artillery and aviation attacks. During the retreat, these divisions suffered heavy losses in men and equipment. Almost all heavy weapons and vehicles were destroyed or captured by our troops. Nevertheless, the main forces of the 4th and 17th corps left the Nikopol trap. Major Kandutsh wrote in his diary: "The bag is torn. Scherner said goodbye. Without him and his chief of staff, we might be marching towards Siberia by now. Everyone who fought in Nikopol will never forget what we owe to Scherner."

Tippelskirch equated this operation with the Korsun-Shevchenko catastrophe: "A heavy defeat, not much inferior in scale to the catastrophe of the 8th Army, marked the beginning of February ... when the ledge held by German troops in the Nikopol region was attacked by Russian troops from the north and from the south. Manganese mines in the area of the city of Marganets ... the defense of which was

the main reason for holding a tactically unfavorable ledge, and Nikopol itself, including the bridgehead on the left bank of the Dnieper, also attacked from the south, were lost on February 8. German divisions ... only at the cost of very heavy losses managed to retreat to the area south of Krivoy Rog.

After the elimination of the enemy in the Nikopol area, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front with the forces of the 37th Army continued to fight south of Veseli Terny. The 46th Army advanced to the line northwest of Apostolovo, the 8th Guards - southwest of Apostolovo. The 6th Army entered the Novaya Vorontsovka area. On February 10, the 3rd Guards Army was transferred to the 3rd Ukrainian Front, but was soon withdrawn to the Stavka reserve. The 5th shock army, which had also transferred to the front, on February 10 crossed the Dnieper in extremely difficult conditions and captured a bridgehead on its right bank in the area northwest of Maliye Lepetikh.

For several days, the troops of the front brought up artillery, brought up ammunition, preparing for the resumption of the offensive in the Kryvyi Rih direction.

In accordance with the new plan, a blow in the general direction to Krivoy Rog was delivered from two directions - by the 37th Army from the northeast and the 46th Army from the south. east.

The 37th Army, hiding behind part of the forces on the right flank, was supposed to break through the defenses on a 10-kilometer sector bypassing Krivoy Rog from the north. 46th Army had

the task of breaking through the enemy's defenses in the center of their lane on a 16-kilometer sector, striking directly at Krivoy Rog and, in cooperation with the 37th Army, destroying enemy troops in this area. In the breakthrough areas of both armies, a density of 40-50 guns and mortars per 1 km of the front was created.

The offensive began on February 17: the 37th Army - at 5 am, the 46th Army - at 10 o'clock after a 30-minute artillery preparation. Snowfall and a blizzard hampered the actions of the troops, excluded the possibility of using aviation. This time the enemy did not let himself be taken by surprise. He was expecting a blow right here and was preparing to repel it. In a number of sectors, the Germans, ahead of the Soviet artillery, struck at the initial position of the advancing troops. Sharokhin and Glagolev brought the second echelons into battle, but this did not bring much success either: "The enemy repulsed the attacks of our infantry with organized fire and counterattacks. Each strong point passed from hand to hand several times. The gaps between strongholds were blocked by the Nazis with minefields. It was too difficult to break through the defenses heavily saturated with tanks without tanks. The escort artillery, which consolidated the success of the attack, was, in fact, bulky, unprotected targets, quickly put out of action ... our offensive turned into a slow gnaw."

During the first two days, rifle units advanced from 5 to 12 km.

The fighting on the distant approaches to Krivoy Rog was of an exceptionally stubborn nature. The enemy concentrated five infantry and two tank divisions in this area and continuously counterattacked. What these panzer divisions were, we already imagine. But on February 20, the mechanized corps of Tanaschishin was transferred from Apostolovo to the Krivoy Rog region, replenished to a full staff. The corps was given two self-propelled artillery regiments SU-76 and SU-85, a separate tank regiment armed with British Valentine and T-34 tanks, and a separate regiment of Centurion tanks.

With the appearance of 250 tanks and self-propelled guns on the southern outskirts, "the enemy significantly weakened the resistance and on February 22 was driven out of the city" by units of the 37th and 46th armies, which launched a simultaneous attack from the southeast and northwest.

By February 29, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front with the right wing and center advanced to the Ingulets River. Having seized on the move bridgeheads on its western coast,

the troops of the front took advantageous positions for subsequent strikes in the direction of Nikolaev and Odessa. Having eliminated the Nikopol bridgehead and pushed the enemy back from the Zaporizhzhya bend of the Dnieper, the Soviet troops deprived the German command of the last hope of restoring communication by land with the 17th Army blockaded in the Crimea. A significant reduction in the front line allowed the Soviet command to release forces to capture the Crimean peninsula. It was also announced that "more than 40,000 Nazis found their grave on the battlefields, 4,600 people were taken prisoner," to add them to the previous reports.

During the two-month winter offensive of the troops of the Ukrainian fronts, the situation on the southern wing of the Soviet-German front changed dramatically. The German defenses from Pripyat to the lower reaches of the Dnieper were breached by successive and simultaneous strikes, the largest enemy groupings were defeated, and the defensive plans of the German command in the south were completely thwarted. The Soviet troops eliminated the ledges in the front line that jutted out to the east, eliminated the threat to the flanks and, advancing to the line of Lutsk, Shepetovka, Zvenigorodka, Kirovograd, Krivoy Rog, Kakhovka, took an advantageous operational position for inflicting deep cutting blows and reaching the flanks of the main enemy groupings. Having mastered the major railway junctions, the Soviet troops

got the opportunity to use the most important communications and significantly improved the conditions for maneuver and supply. A favorable environment was created for the further development of the offensive in order to complete the liberation of Ukraine and reach the state border of the USSR.

## SPRING OFFENSIVE

The German high command was well aware of the crisis brewing in the south. On February 10, 1944, the report of the General Staff on the situation on the Eastern Front stated: "A particularly strong threat is planned for the German forces located between the Black Sea and the region of the river. Pripyat. Here, as before, remains the main direction of operations of the Soviet troops. A decisive success against Army Group "South" would completely free the enemy's path to the Balkans and Poland and would make it impossible for the Germans to further defend the existing front line. Therefore, the course of these operations in the sector of Army Group South, along with the future deployment of operations on the northern flank of the German troops, will primarily decide the fate of the entire German eastern front as a whole.

Manstein, foreseeing a new Soviet offensive, rightly feared for his left flank, guarded only by weak forces, and repeatedly demanded that another army be concentrated in the Rovno area. However, Hitler, who considered at the moment the priority task of eliminating the threat of an allied landing in the West, believed that the offensive impulse of the Red Army had already been exhausted, in the spring the Soviets would not be able to conduct major offensive operations, and until May, when new reserves would be accumulated, the soldiers of the Eastern Front are obliged and able to hold out: "The more difficult the situation at the front became, the more important he attached "faith" in final victory. This "faith" began to play a big role for him in the selection of commanders for positions from the division commander and above.

Therefore, Manstein and Kleist received from the OKH reserve only two infantry divisions for two.

The command of the Army Group "South" had to find internal reserves. First of all, it strengthened its left wing, over which Soviet troops hung from the north. From the 1st Panzer and 8th armies, the 1st, 11th and 16th armies were transferred to the north

tank divisions. They were to be followed by the 17th Tank and 18th Artillery to concentrate in the Proskurov area. The 7th Panzer Division, the Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler" and the 503rd Heavy Tank Battalion, which were to be concentrated in the Ternopil region, were also allocated to the disposal of General Raus. The defense zone of the 4th Panzer Army, which aimed at holding the Ternopil-Dubno sector, was reduced, and the combat formations of the troops were compacted. The regrouping was planned to be completed by March 15.

The headquarters of the Army Group "South" in early March moved to Kamenetz-Podolsky, and then to Lvov, on the left flank. Manstein considered it more expedient to place the headquarters in the center of his grouping, but Hitler forbade moving to Romanian territory.

The relations of the allies were rather strained, they can be illustrated by a characteristic episode from the memoirs of Marshal M.E. Katukov, describing the January raid of the 1st Tank Brigade on Zhmerinka: "Bypassing the enemy's strongholds, the tanks of Senior Lieutenant Kostylev and Lieutenant Gorbach, as well as the armored personnel carrier of Lieutenant Balyuk, were the first to reach the dam near Sutisky. Here they witnessed a border conflict. The fact is that beyond the Southern Bug began the territory

"Great Transnistria" - the occupied Soviet lands given by Hitler to Romania. Seeing the Soviet tanks, the Germans tried to slip to the west bank. But the Romanian outpost suddenly demanded compliance with the formalities of the border regime. The enraged Nazis turned into a chain, opened automatic fire on the border guards. The border guards responded with machine gun and rifle fire. The tanks of Balyuk and Gavrishko quickly settled the border incident: having crushed both conflicting parties, they captured the dam and the power plant ... "

Despite the measures taken to restore the defeated divisions, the Germans failed to make up for the losses suffered in the winter.

However, the spring thaw was coming, which, in the opinion of the German command, excluded the conduct of major offensive operations. Counting on a long pause in hostilities, the OKH sought to use the time to recuperate and build a solid defense.

It wasn't there. Stalin firmly decided that by May the Red Army should stand on the state border of the USSR. Therefore, back in mid-February, it was decided to continue the offensive on all fronts without any respite, despite the weather and climatic conditions, in order to dismember the German front with powerful blows from Polesie to the mouth of the Dnieper and, destroying the enemy troops in parts, complete the liberation of the Right-Bank Ukraine and create favorable conditions for further actions to the west and towards the Balkans.

The Headquarters assigned the decisive role to the troops of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts. According to the directives issued on February 18, the 1st Ukrainian Front was to strike from the Dubno-Shepetovka-Lyubar line through Chortkiv to Chernivtsi in order to cut off Manstein's main forces to the west in the strip north of the Dniester. The attack of the 2nd Ukrainian Front was planned from the line of Zvenigorodka - Shpola to Uman and further to the Dniester. Stalin took over the direct leadership and coordination of the actions of the two fronts.

On February 28, the 3rd Ukrainian Front was tasked with crossing the Ingulets and, turning the German defenses on the lower reaches of the river, "to fall on the enemy troops defending Nikolaev." At the same time, the forces of the newly created 2nd Belorussian Front under the command of Colonel General P.A. Kurochkin was supposed to go to the rear of Army Group Center. The front was tasked with striking at Kovel, and then advancing on Brest and reaching the Western Bug. The 4th Ukrainian Front completely switched over to the preparation of the Crimean operation.

The beginning of the offensive both in the Right-Bank Ukraine and in the Crimea was scheduled for the first days of March.

Given the conditions of the slush, the Supreme High Command sought to minimize the regrouping of troops. For the most expedient use of the grouping already formed at the end of previous operations, the dividing lines between the fronts were changed and individual armies were reassigned. The shock groupings of the fronts were reinforced by the reserves of the Headquarters. The 2nd Belorussian Front received from the neighboring fronts the 61st Army, the headquarters of the 47th Army, a rifle corps and a number of artillery and engineering formations; from the Stavka reserve - the 70th combined arms and 6th air armies. The 1st Ukrainian Front transferred its left-flank 2nd and 6th tank, 40th combined-arms armies to the neighbor on the left and, in accordance with the tasks received, regrouped the main forces to the right wing. The 4th Panzer Army of Lieutenant General V.M. was advanced to its composition from the reserve. Badanova. 3-

th Ukrainian received from Konev the left-flank 57th Army of Lieutenant General N.A. Hagen and the 28th Army from the 4th Ukrainian Front. Main Forces General

Malinovsky concentrated on bridgeheads on the right bank of the Ingulets, south of Krivoy Rog. The troops received reinforcements and more than 750 tanks. In total, six tank armies, nine separate tank and mechanized corps, and more than 50 separate brigades and regiments were involved from the tank troops.

The Soviet command preempted the enemy in concentrating and deploying forces. Despite the bad weather and lack of roads, the regroupings ended mostly within the scheduled and very short time frame, while the casting of enemy troops to the left wing of Army Group South was still ongoing. The increased maneuverability of Soviet tanks and American Studebakers played a role.

On the front from Lutsk to Kherson, the troops of the Army Group "South" and "A" continued to defend. By the beginning of March, together with the Hungarian and Romanian units, they had a total of 58 infantry, 18 tank, 4 motorized, 1 artillery, 2 security divisions and a motorized brigade - a total of 1,400,000 people, 14,500 guns and mortars, 2,000 tanks and assault guns, 1530 aircraft.

The combat and numerical strength of the Soviet troops in Right-Bank Ukraine in early March, according to Soviet sources: 1,930,000 people, 29,700 guns and mortars, 2,442 tanks and self-propelled guns, 1,578 aircraft.

True, Marshal Vasilevsky claims that, for example, in terms of tanks, the Ukrainian fronts outnumbered the enemy by 2.5 times. Therefore, either we had 5,000 cars,

or the Germans - about 980. The latter is more likely. But what could the chief of the General Staff know, he did not have a diploma in history. "In March 1944," states Manstein, "the hour came when we

had to pay the price for the great mistake made by the German High Command, which was that they were unwilling to give up anything (whether in the east or in other theaters of war) when it was necessary to achieve superiority in a decisive sector, or at least at least concentrate enough forces on it ...

The mistake was, further, that since the failure of the last German offensive, Operation Citadel, the High Command had tried to hold overly extended fronts with insufficient forces, which had caused a completely unnecessary expenditure of forces.

Finally, the High Command was mistaken in demanding that the southern flank of the Eastern Front be chained to the defense of the front's far-protruding bulges to the east: first in the Donetsk region, then in the Dnieper arc and in the Crimea, as a result of which the enemy was able to cut off those occupying them

groupings. At the same time, it lost sight of the fact that the outcome of the campaign would not be decided on these ledges, but where the enemy succeeded in pushing the entire German southern flank to the south, to the Black Sea and Rumania. Since Operation Citadel, this decisive sector of the front has always been the northern flank of Army Group South.

Now it was too late!"

On March 4, 1944, the 1st Ukrainian Front began the Proskurov-Chernigov operation.

The front included 13, 60, 1st guards, 18th and 38th combined arms, 3rd guards, 1st and 4th tank, 2nd air armies, 4th guards and 25th th tank corps, 1st and 6th guards cavalry corps.

The main blow was delivered to Proskurov by the troops of the 13th, 60th and 1st Guards armies, the 3rd Guards and 4th tank armies, reinforced by the entire artillery of the front. In addition, two army strikes were planned to be carried out on the left wing in close cooperation with Konev's troops. The width of the breakthrough areas varied from 5 to 13 km. The tank army of Katukov was a reserve.

To create a strike force, Chernyakhovsky's army moved to the right half of its lane, and the left was inferior to the 1st Guards Army. That, in turn, handed over its lane to the 18th Army, whose front as a result of this doubled. In order to mask the ongoing activities, the 60th Army left one rifle corps in the old positions, transferring it to the 1st Guards. The latter did the same in its former lane, receiving in return the 17th Guards Rifle Corps from the 38th Army. The tank army of Rybalko moved from the Shumsk region to the strike group, and the 1st and 4th tank armies, which were at the completion of the 1st and 4th tank armies, made a 350-kilometer march from Kyiv.

The offensive was planned to be carried out in two stages to a total depth of 80-85 km within 12 days. Three days were allotted to complete the immediate task with a depth of 50 km.

The most difficult was the regrouping of the troops of the 60th Army, which had to not only move a significant part of its formations to a new lane, but also move forward 30 km, taking a more advantageous position. On February 26, Chernyakhovsky's troops, together with the 4th Guards Tank Corps, began to advance to a new starting area and, knocking down small enemy groups, reached the line of the Goryn River by March 2 and crossed over it in the area southwest and south of Izyaslav and Kornitsa. Under their cover, on the southern coast of the Goryn, the tank armies of Rybalko and Badanov occupied the initial areas.

To ensure the secrecy of the measures taken, the preparation of an offensive in the zone of the 38th Army was simulated: reconnaissance was carried out here, artillery sighting, a false concentration of rifle and tank formations, and, finally, on March 2, a private attack.

It was considered very important to carry out preparations in such terms that the German command considered it impossible to organize a major offensive. As a result, it was not possible to create the necessary fuel reserves, so the tankers went into battle with only half of the refueling.

In total, the 1st Ukrainian Front consisted of 56 rifle, 6 cavalry divisions, 7 tank, 3 mechanized corps, 2 fortified areas - 800,000 people, 11,900 guns and mortars, 1,400 tanks and self-propelled guns, 477 aircraft.

In front of the front, in the sector from Rozhische to Oratov, troops of the 4th and 1st tank armies operated - 9 infantry (of which one Romanian and three Hungarian), 9 tank, 1 motorized, 1 security division, a motorized brigade, the 503rd and 509th heavy tank battalions, 5 assault gun brigades, as well as two consolidated groups -

500,000 men, 5,530 guns and mortars, 1,100 tanks and self-propelled guns, 480 aircraft.

The German defense was of the field type and consisted of separate trenches and rifle cells of a full and incomplete profile, connected by communications, and

strongholds prepared for all-round defense. The depth of the first strip reached 4-6 km, the second strip was being prepared 10-12 km from the front edge.

The command of the Army Group "South" saw its main task in gaining time and, if possible, maintaining the combat capability of its troops. As Hitler declared to General Zeidler: "Someday the Russians will stop advancing."

The area where the fighting was to unfold is a plain, cut up by a dense network of river valleys and ravines, especially near the left tributaries of the Dniester. The Southern Bug, Dniester, Prut tactically hampered the development of the operation. Moreover, they had to be forced during the spring flood. The road network was largely destroyed, making it difficult for troops to maneuver, as well as transport and evacuation. In addition, the spring thaw has begun. Since artillery and vehicles had to provide a few highways, only country roads remained for infantry and horse-drawn vehicles.

"Under such conditions," Marshal Moskalenko shares his experience, "the troops opposing each other, like a magnet, are drawn to cities and paved roads. A fierce struggle flares up for settlements, which are road junctions, and the attackers have to overcome the fierce resistance of the enemy, which, naturally, slows down the pace of their advance.

The German command also understood this. Hitler, like all dictators, who considered himself a great commander and the greatest fortifier of all time, declared important settlements and communications centers "fortresses." They appointed "commandants" who were responsible with their honor for the defense of the "fortress" and, in the event of its fall, paid for it with their heads. The armies, in the bands of which these "fortresses" declared personally by the Fuhrer were located, were supposed to provide them with supplies and garrisons. Hitler thought that these settlements would block the way to important roads or lines, and their garrisons, if necessary, would fight in the environment, holding down and delaying the advance of the attackers.

In principle, a sound idea, but brought to the point of absurdity, could not lead to success in a war of maneuver. As Manstein writes: "In practice, it turned out that more troops were allocated for the defense of these cities than was appropriate for their retention. Needless to say, there was nowhere to get these forces from. "Fortresses" without fortifications with a hastily assembled weak garrison sooner or later fell into the hands of the enemy, not fulfilling their assigned role. Therefore, the command of the army group in each individual case demanded and finally achieved that these "fortresses" were abandoned until their encirclement by the enemy became inevitable.

This conclusion is confirmed by Moskalenko: "... the garrisons of the "fortresses" offered resistance only until their encirclement became inevitable. Having discovered our evasive movements, the Nazis threw down heavy weapons and hastily fled ... While advancing, we somehow did not even feel that we were dealing with fortresses. For example, that the city of Vinnitsa was declared a fortress by the Nazi command, I learned only many years later, after the war, from the memoirs of the Nazi generals. The only thing that caught my eye during the days of the spring battles of 1944 was that, in particular, the captured teams of the 38th Army did not have to collect weapons and equipment abandoned by the Nazis across the fields, since the enemy troops left all this in the settlements " .

During the preparation of the operation, on February 29, during a trip to the troops in

shootout with a detachment of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army was mortally wounded

General Vatutin. Stalin ordered Zhukov to temporarily take over the 1st Ukrainian Front. On March 1, the Deputy Supreme Commander took command. The marshal made only one change to the plan of operation: considering the 13th Army insufficiently prepared for the offensive, he set defensive tasks for it.

In the very first days of commanding the front, Georgy Konstantinovich demonstrated to his subordinates his "ndrave". Head of the engineering troops of the front, General B.V. Blagoslavov recalled how Zhukov, having barely taken command, gathered the commanders at night for a meeting. There, on the basis of brief reports, he was ready to present some for awards, remove others from their posts, put others on trial, and simply shoot the fourth. At the same time, the marshal widely used untranslatable Russian expressions. Zhukov immediately did not like Blagoslovov. When the general asked to address him without swearing and threats, the marshal drew his Mauser. Blagoslov grabbed his parabellum in response. But the American duel did not take place. Blagoslavov, remembering the chain of command, reminded Zhukov that he was waiting for his shot. Zhukov, in turn, realized that for the execution on the spot of such a high-ranking general, he would not be patted on the head. Georgy Konstantinovich removed the Mauser and promised that he would still get to Blagoslavov.

General G.I. remembered communication with the new commander for the rest of his life. Khetagurov: "Excessively rude, to the point of insulting human feelings." Georgy Ivanovich, a man of Caucasian blood, did not allow to wipe his feet on himself and soon flew down three steps from the post of chief of staff of the 1st Guards Army. For the hero of the defense of Moscow and Stalingrad, the position of commander of the 82nd Infantry Division at Malinovsky was hardly found.

But a true friend V.D. Sokolovsky, who failed in the post of commander of the Western Front, Zhukov instantly took to his post of chief of staff of the front, "pushing" General A.N. Bogolyubov.

On March 4, at 8 o'clock in the morning, the troops of the 60th and 1st Guards armies, after artillery preparation, went on the offensive. But the artillery fired shells, which were already lacking, in vain. Literally the day before, Manstein, making sure that he did not have time to tightly close the threatened direction, began to withdraw the 59th Army Corps of General Schultz. So, without a fight, the Germans left Shepetovka.

Nevertheless, the Soviet offensive began successfully. Having broken the resistance of the enemy rearguards, the troops of Chernyakhovsky and Grechko in the first half of the day captured the entire first line of defense. Then, in the zone of the 60th Army, 730 tanks of the 4th and 3rd Guards Tank Armies were introduced into the battle, advancing up to 25 km by the end of the day. To the right, the 4th Guards Kantemirovskiy tank corps of Poluboyarov, which had 53 T-34 tanks and 26 SU-85 self-propelled guns, rushed to Zbarazh. In the zone of the 60th Army, the enemy retreated to Ternopil and Volochisk, in front of the 1st Guards - to Starokonstantinov.

The main obstacle for the advancing troops at first was only mud, which made the roads almost impassable for vehicles.

The next day, the 11th Rifle Corps of the 18th Army went on the offensive (after the death of General Leselidze, Lieutenant General E.P. Zhuravlev took command of the army). In two days, the strike force of the 1st Ukrainian Front overcame the enemy's defenses on a front of 180 km and, bypassing the "fortresses" and intercepting communications, advanced to a depth of 25 to 50 km. The troops, having tank formations in front, did not slow down the pace of advance.

On March 7-10, advanced units reached the Ternopil-Proskurov line and cut the Lvov-Odessa railway communication, which was important for the entire southern wing of the German troops. Between the 4th and 1st tank armies was driven



deep wedge. Kantemirovtsy and parts of the 15th Rifle Corps broke into Ternopil, went through it and reached the southern outskirts of the city. But at that moment, the advanced units of the enemy's 7th Panzer Division began to approach from the south and immediately engage in battle.

On March 9, Grechko's troops took Starokonstantinov. By the end of March 10, the 18th Army advanced up to 30 km and started fighting for Khmilnik. The next day, bypassing Vinnitsa with the main forces from the south, Moskalenko's army went on the offensive, which included 11 rifle divisions and 10 artillery regiments against three enemy infantry divisions. The 13th Army, defending with its main forces in the sector north of Lutsk, the left flank, interacting with the 60th Army, successfully advanced to Brody.

By this time, Manstein had concentrated 9 tank and 6 infantry divisions on the new defensive line. From March 7, the Germans launched numerous counterattacks. Bright's 3rd Panzer Corps counterattacked from Proskurov to the northwest, and General Balk's 48th Panzer Corps to the east of Ternopol. After two days of fighting, the Soviet units left Ternopil and entrenched themselves northeast of the city. But the armies of Rybalko and Badanov not only held the railway line, but also pushed the enemy to the south. However, they could not advance further, besides, the tankers had only an emergency supply of fuel, the bulk of the artillery lagged behind. The commander of the 4th Panzer Army, General Badanov, was seriously wounded, General Lelyushenko was appointed in his place. The battles took on the character of artillery duels without moving forward.

In this situation, on March 10, Zhukov suggested that the Headquarters take a breather.

Simultaneously with the 1st Ukrainian Front, Konev's troops were conducting the Uman Botoshansk offensive. The transfer by the command of Army Group South of tank formations from Uman to its left wing made the task easier.

By the beginning of March, the 2nd Ukrainian Front included the 4th, 5th and 7th guards, 27th, 40th, 52nd, 53rd combined arms, 2nd, 6th and 5th guards tank, 5th air armies, 5th Guards Cavalry, 7th and 8th

Mechanized Corps. In total, the front had 56 rifle, 3 cavalry divisions, 6 tank and 3 mechanized corps, 2 tank brigades, 4 tank regiments and 4 self-propelled artillery regiments - 630,000 people, 8800 guns and mortars, 670 tanks and self-propelled guns, 551 aircraft. In the units, there was a significant shortage in personnel, weapons and military equipment. For example, in three tank armies, there were 464 tanks and 116 self-propelled guns. But in terms of engineering, "the armies were provided generously as never before" - up to seven sapper companies per 1 km of the front.

The troops of the 8th Army, part of the forces of the 6th Army and the 1st Infantry Division from the Hube Army were defending in front of the front - a total of 9 infantry, 4 tank, 2 motorized divisions, corps group "A", 3 tank battalions and 6 brigades of assault guns, numbering 400,000 people, 3540 guns and mortars, up to 250 tanks and assault guns, 500 aircraft.

Most of the German troops, who had not recovered even after the Korsun Shevchenko defeat, were in the first echelon, the 11th and 14th tank divisions and the 506th heavy tank battalion were withdrawn to the reserve. Regarding their staffing, Manstein's rhetorical question speaks eloquently: "How could effective counterattacks be delivered if, for example, there were only 24 serviceable tanks in the entire tank corps?"

The rugged terrain, a large number of small and large rivers, ravines and gullies favored the organization of defense.

The 2nd Ukrainian Front was supposed to break through it in two sectors, inflicting the main blow in the direction of Uman with the forces of the 27th, 52nd and 4th Guards combined arms (21

division) and the 6th, 2nd and 5th Guards Tank Armies. The two armies adjoining the main attack sector - the 40th and 53rd - were given the task of creating groupings of five rifle divisions each on these flanks and, using a breakthrough in the main direction, strike in order to secure the main grouping of the front on the left and right and expansion of the breakout band. At a distance of 150 km from the main direction, an auxiliary attack was made on Novoukrainka by the adjacent flanks of the 5th and 7th Guards armies. The general task: to defeat the Uman group of Germans and go to the Dniester, pinning the enemy to the Carpathians.

The 7th and 8th mechanized corps were withdrawn for staffing and did not take part in the operation.

With the main goal of defeating the 8th German Army, the troops of the front simultaneously cut off the escape routes to the south of the 1st Panzer Army of the enemy and assisted the 1st Ukrainian Front in its defeat, and assisted the Malinovsky Front advancing against the 6th German Army with an auxiliary strike. .

On March 4, reconnaissance in force was carried out along the entire front.

The shock group went on the offensive on March 5. Aircraft did not operate due to thick fog. After artillery preparation at 7.50 infantry and tanks went on the attack. In the first echelon, along with rifle formations, advanced units of the 2nd and 5th Guards Tank Armies also moved.

The offensive, which began in inclement weather and slush, was unexpected for the enemy, which ensured a quick break-in of his defenses.

After breaking through the first position at a depth of up to 1.5 km from the front edge of defense, in order to build up the force of impact and develop success, Konev on the very first day brought into battle the main forces of the 2nd Panzer Army (3rd and 16th Panzer Corps) and 5 1st Guards Tank Army (18th, 20th, 29th Tank Corps). Then the advancement of the 6th Tank Army (5th Guards Tank and 5th Mechanized Corps) began.

By the end of the day, the tank army of General Bogdanov had reached the Gorny Tikich River, advancing 14-16 km; By nightfall, the infantry of the 27th Army reached this line.

During the night, engineer-sapper units, with the help of troops, equipped crossings. Formations of the 2nd Panzer Army crossed over them - 331 tanks and self-propelled guns - and developed an offensive on Uman, moving into the zone of the 52nd Army. soviet tanks, appeared behind enemy lines, forced him to start a retreat in the army zone of General Koroteev. In order to build on the success of Trofimenko's army, the 6th Panzer Army, which had 121 tanks and 32 self-propelled guns, was introduced into its zone.

The result was somewhat lower in the band of the 4th Guards Army, where Rotmistrov's tank army operated - 196 combat vehicles. However, by March 6, they also completed the breakthrough of tactical defense, reached the Gorny Tikich River, and the next day they crossed it with advanced units.

On March 8, when the operational defense was shattered, the 5th and 7th Guards Armies went on the offensive. They successfully broke through the defenses and began to develop an offensive through Novoukrainovka to Pervomaik.

On the morning of March 9, the weather improved, which allowed the 5th Air Army to deliver a series of strikes against the enemy troops and assist the ground forces in moving forward.

The Germans rolled back to the west, the Soviet troops began to pursue. In six days during the spring thaw, they advanced to a depth of about 70 km.

On March 10, units of the 2nd Tank Army, in cooperation with the 29th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank and 52nd Combined Arms Armies, broke into Uman on the move, capturing rich trophies, including, as a Soviet source fantasizes: "200 completely serviceable Tigers, Panthers, Ferdinands. I don't know what's the matter, either our commanders and historians did not know German technology, or other machines for

they have too small "game", but by all means give them "tigers" and "panthers". No, although the Germans managed to blow up a lot, there were trophies, of course, and significant trophies. But definitely not Ferdinands. In March 1944, the Wehrmacht lost 19 Panthers and 28 Tigers on all fronts. As for the much-loved Ferdinands, 90 units were produced in total, losses in March amounted to 3 cars. The most massive assault guns Z@@ Sh.

At the same time, units of the 6th Panzer and 27th Armies captured Khristianovka.

After the liberation of Khristianovka, the 6th Panzer Army, which had only 20 combat vehicles left, was put into reserve. Is losing 133 tanks and self-propelled guns in four days a good result?

On the path of the further offensive of the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, the overflowing Southern Bug was a major natural barrier. The German command hoped that the German troops would be able to gain a foothold on the river and prevent the further advance of the Red Army. To this end, it sought to withdraw its divisions behind the Southern Bug as soon as possible, put them in order and organize a solid defense. The withdrawal was covered by strong rearguards, which offered stubborn resistance.

Considering this circumstance, Konev increased the pace of the persecution. For a quick exit to the river and forcing it on the move, the command formed forward detachments, including tanks, motorized infantry, artillery and sappers. Because of the impassability and mud, the guns, as a rule, moved on a trailer behind the tanks.

It was widely practiced to advance small subunits on the enemy's withdrawal route, which mined the roads, attacked the retreating troops from ambushes, delaying their withdrawal in every possible way.

As a result, on March 11, Soviet troops reached the Southern Bug at the same time as the retreating enemy, and in some areas even earlier.

In its middle reaches, the Southern Bug reaches a width of 90–120 m and a depth of 1–4 m. wire fences. These fortifications, combined with a natural obstacle, which was a flooded river, represented a formidable defensive line. But the Red Army also learned a lot.

Without giving the enemy a break, Soviet troops on boats, rafts, pontoons and improvised means began to cross the river on the move on a 100-kilometer front. The crossing was started by advanced detachments, the first to reach the river.

"How could it be that the enemy succeeded so quickly? Manstein analyzes the situation. - After all, until now it has always been possible to regulate the pace of withdrawal when it becomes necessary, as well as either stop the enemy who has broken through, or prevent him from entering the operational space, at least to limit the further development of his operations.

In addition to the overwhelming superiority of forces, the reason for this was, of course, the final exhaustion of the forces of our troops. The German divisions in continuous battles from mid-July were literally crushed. The numerical composition of the regiments reached only a small part of its original size, the remaining forces were also exhausted due to the constant overstrain of forces. The very small reinforcements sent to us, having no military experience, could not compensate for the losses in experienced non-commissioned officers and soldiers. The core of the troops, therefore, was largely used up ... In general, however, there were simply not enough people and equipment to defend large spaces in which the enemy, who often outnumbered us by many times, always found a gap to strike.

Significant success was also achieved by the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, who, synchronously with other fronts, launched the Bereznegovato-Snigirev operation.

As a result of the regroupings carried out in the second half of February, the front was significantly strengthened. It included the 5th shock, 8th guards, 6, 28, 37, 46, 57th combined arms, 17th air armies,

23rd tank, 2nd and 4th guards mechanized and 4th 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. In total, Malinovsky had 57 rifle, 3 cavalry divisions, a tank and 2 mechanized corps, 1 fortified area - 500,000 people, 7184 guns and mortars, 573 tanks, 593 aircraft.

The 6th German and 3rd Romanian armies defended in the front line, consisting of 23 infantry, 4 tank, 1 motorized divisions, the 93rd and 560th tank battalions, 8 brigades of assault guns - 500,000 people, 3386 guns and mortars, 359 tanks, 550 aircraft. The Romanian army could not be counted, since it was located beyond the Southern Bug - on "Romanian territory."

After the heavy defeat of the 6th German Army near Nikopol, Krivoy Rog and its retreat across the Ingulets River, the German command hoped to use the spilled river for defense and prevent further advance of the Soviet troops.

The 3rd Ukrainian Front received the task, using the bridgeheads on the Ingulets River south of Krivoy Rog, to deliver the main blow with the forces of the 46th and 8th Guards armies, the cavalry mechanized group and the tank corps in the direction of Novy Bug in order to split the front of the 6th the German army, and then turn the troops to the south and cut off the escape routes of the German troops operating east of Nikolaev. The troops of the right wing - the 57th and 37th armies struck in order to pin down the left-flank formations of the 6th German army. The 6th and 5th shock armies were to advance in the direction of Bereznegovatoe and Snigirevka with the task, in cooperation with the 8th Guards and KMG, to defeat the right-flank formations of General Veler. The 28th Army, in cooperation with the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, was tasked with advancing along the right bank of the Dnieper in the general direction of Kherson and Nikolaev.

Soviet units in previous battles suffered heavy losses. In many divisions, between 30 and 40 percent of the personnel remained; The 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps had only 28 tanks. Despite this, the troops were preparing for the offensive.

Pliev's mobile group focused on the Chuikov army conquered

bridgehead west of Shirokoye. It included the 4th Kuban Cossack, 4th Guards Mechanized Corps and the 5th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade. The mechanized corps of Tanaschishin had 123 tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts. The depth of the assigned task was 170 km. Therefore, everything necessary for a deep raid was loaded onto the armor: barrels of fuel, boxes of ammunition; guns, mobile radio stations and field kitchens were taken in tow.

In front of the front of the 8th Guards Army (9 rifle divisions, a separate tank regiment), the 3rd mountain rifle and 16th motorized divisions of the 4th Army Corps were defending. Moreover, the Germans themselves called the motorized division "the former shadow." Therefore, to strengthen it, General Hollidt advanced his last reserve - the 24th Panzer Division of General von Edelsheim.

At dawn on March 6, the troops of the main group, after artillery and aviation preparation, attacked enemy positions. The 23rd Panzer Corps, which had 102 tanks and 16 self-propelled guns, operated in the zone of the 46th Army. On the same day, the offensive began in other areas. However, low artillery densities coupled with a very short artillery preparation did not allow reliable suppression of the enemy defenses, which offered stubborn resistance throughout the day. The advance began to slow down.

Then at 21.30, in inclement weather, Malinovsky brought horseback into battle.

mechanized group. Her strike was unexpected and predetermined the breakthrough of the defense to the entire operational depth. The main obstacle was not the resistance of the enemy, but absolute impassability.

Tanks crashed into the defense kilometer after kilometer, moving along the bottom in the mud with a huge overload of all mechanisms. They literally crawled, the speed did not exceed 3-4 km per hour. During the movement, the tracks were torn, the clutches burned, the gearboxes and engines failed. During the first day of hostilities, 42 vehicles were out of order. Faulty tanks stood at almost every kilometer. The weakest were the English "Valentines" and "Centurions". They were completely unsuitable for operations in the conditions of spring thaw and almost all of them broke down or got stuck in the first 20 kilometers. The most enduring were the "thirty-fours" and the SU-85 created on their basis.

On the morning of March 8, the mobile group, having overcome 45 km, reached the approaches to the city of Novy Bug, in which the headquarters of the 6th Army was located. There were large warehouses of food, fuel, ammunition and uniforms. The city was attacked on the move by cavalry supported by 36 tanks. General Hollidt did not expect such a rapid exit of the Soviet units to the city. The entire personnel of the army headquarters and the support units attached to it, the remnants of the 16th motorized division and the units of the 79th infantry division that had barely unloaded at the railway station, were thrown into its defense. However, unable to withstand the blow of the cavalry and tank regiments, the Germans left the city. Hastily drove off to Nikolaev and General Hollidt.

With the capture of the New Bug, the front of the German 6th Army was split into two isolated parts. Malinovsky decided to start by defeating the southern group and turned the 8th Guards Army and the cavalry-mechanized group to the south. Moving along the eastern bank of the Ingul River to Nikolaev, they intercepted the escape routes of German troops retreating under the blows of the armies of the left wing of the front. Pliev's group was ordered to capture Nikolaev by the morning of March 10.

The Germans tried to delay the advance of mobile formations with massive air strikes. The conditions for this were the most favorable. Nearby were airfields with concrete runways, there was a clear

weather, the terrain was a flat steppe. And most importantly, the Soviet units did not have air cover and air defense equipment. Tanaschishin's corps had four anti-aircraft guns.

Aircraft of the Luftwaffe continuously hovered over the columns of the advancing troops: they bombed and shot from machine guns and cannons, hunted for tanks and horses. Conditions, as in the training ground. Tank crews survived as best they could: they simulated the burning of cars, maneuvered across the steppe, fired back from machine guns, and even fired at aircraft from tank guns. The losses were great.

"German aviation exhausted our units with continuous assault strikes," recalls General I.A. Pliev, - and we could not oppose our fighter aircraft to it. Only at night did we develop combat operations at full strength and make up for lost time. If the Cavalry-Mechanized Group had reliable air cover, then we would have completed all our tasks many times more successfully both in terms of time and operational results.

This unprecedented raid continued for three days. On March 12, the cavalry and mechanized corps, in conditions of continuous bombardment and counterattacks by enemy ground forces, left the west to Ingulets south of Snigirevka, putting the entire southern enemy grouping under the threat of complete encirclement.

At the same time, the troops of the 6th, 5th shock and 28th armies were pushing the enemy from the east and south. The ghost of Stalingrad hovered over the 6th Army again.

The next day, the army of General Grechkin captured Kherson, freeing him from

enemy the last section of the right bank of the Dnieper.

As a result of Soviet attacks from the east, north, west and south, ten German divisions operating in front of the left wing of the front in the Bereznegovatoe-Snigirevka area found themselves in an extremely difficult situation. To create a full-fledged "cauldron" it was necessary to quickly advance the right-flank formations of the 8th Guards Army in a southerly direction. But most of its forces at that time were involved in heavy battles with the enemy in the Vladimirovka-Bashtanka region, since the Germans tried to cut down the Soviet wedge with counter strikes in this area. Here, since March 12, the 23rd Panzer Corps has been involved. Moreover, when moving forward from a fragment of an air bomb, the commander of the corps, Lieutenant General E.G. Pushkin. The battles, according to Chuikov's recollections, broke out desperately, the commander used all means to prevent a breakthrough: "By the end of the day on March 12, the fascist counterattacks became more frequent. There was a real threat of their penetration to Novo-Poltavka. Urgently formed two batteries of 105-mm German guns and put up in firing positions near the wagons with German ammunition spared no shells. Artillerymen fired direct fire at the advancing German infantry. It is difficult now to say how many of them went to certain death. The fire was destructive. I had to create backup crews so that the gunners could be replaced every two or three hours of non-stop fire.

The Chuikovites repulsed all attacks, but to the south, the forces of one KMG were not enough to create a solid internal encirclement front.

As a result, units of the 17th and 44th army corps of the enemy managed to break through the extended battle formations of the cavalry-mechanized group and, having abandoned a significant part of their equipment, began to retreat behind Ingul and in the direction of Nikolaev. The corps of Pliev and Tanaschishin began a parallel pursuit, trying to be the first to reach the crossings across the river.

Subtotals.

By March 11, Soviet troops crushed the enemy defenses on a huge front from Yampol to the Black Sea. The main grouping of the 1st Ukrainian Front advanced to the line Ternopol - Proskurov and deeply wedged between the 4th and 1st tank armies of the enemy. The troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, having defeated the 8th German Army, advanced detachments of mobile formations reached the Southern Bug and cut off the retreat of the 1st Panzer Army of the enemy to the south. The shock grouping of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, having liberated the Novy Bug, cut the 6th German Army into two parts and, with mobile formations, entered the retreat path of its Bereznegovato-Snigirevskaya grouping.

In connection with the success achieved, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command on March 11 clarified the tasks for the troops. The depth of the tasks of all three fronts has increased significantly. The 1st Ukrainian Front was supposed to "not be limited to reaching ... on the river. Dniester, but to force it on the move, developing an attack on Chernivtsi in order to occupy this point and reach our state border. For closer interaction of the armies of the left wing of the front with its main grouping, the 18th and 38th armies had to change the direction of the offensive and aim at Kamenetz-Podolsky, concentrating efforts closer to the right flank. Taking into account the strike of the 2nd Belorussian Front, which was being prepared in the Kovel direction, the Stavka decided, in cooperation with them, to develop the success of the 1st Ukrainian Front not only in the southern, but also in the western direction and ordered it to launch an offensive with the right wing on Brody, Lvov. The start of the offensive in the main direction from the Ternopol-Proskurov line was scheduled for March 20-21.

The 2nd Ukrainian Front needed to resolutely pursue the enemy and, without giving him the opportunity to organize defenses on the Southern Bug, to seize

abroad Murovano - Kurilovtsi - Mogilev-Podolsky - Dniester, capturing crossings on it. It was proposed to withdraw the main grouping to the Mogilev-Podolsky-Yampol region, that is, closer to the right flank. This made it possible at this stage of the offensive not only to fulfill the main task, but also to cooperate more closely with the 1st Ukrainian Front in defeating the 1st Tank Army of Khube. In the future, the main forces of the front were to "seize the Balti-Kishinev region and reach the Prut River - our state border." The transfer of efforts to the south contributed to a more rapid defeat of the coastal grouping of the enemy.

This task was also set for the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which was supposed to prevent the enemy from retreating beyond the Southern Bug, to capture the crossings in the Konstantinovka, Voznesensk, Novaya Odessa sector, "in order to prevent the enemy from organizing on the river. Southern Bug defense", take the cities of Kherson and Odessa on the move, occupy Tiraspol and Odessa and continue the offensive with the aim of reaching the Prut and the northern bank of the Danube.

Thus, the three Ukrainian fronts had to use the 11 March success, complete the defeat of the main forces of the enemy's southern strategic grouping and reach the state border of the USSR.

There were fewer vehicles in Soviet divisions than in Wehrmacht divisions. But at the same time, they showed mobility that surprised the Germans. General Mellendorf explains this phenomenon by the unpretentiousness of the Russian soldier and a much smaller number of rear units, whose main task was to ensure combat activities with complete disregard for people: "In the Red Army, the rear services do not have to worry about providing military units with uniforms, tents, blankets and other items, so necessary for the soldiers of the army of the West. During the offensive, they can afford to forget about

supplying the troops even with food, since the troops are "grazing". The main task of supply units is to deliver fuel and ammunition, but even in this case, combat vehicles are often used for transportation. In a Russian motorized division, a soldier has no other "luggage" than what he has with him, and he manages to move around in cars, perched on boxes of ammunition or barrels of fuel.

Indeed, it is difficult for us to imagine a company of butchers, which was available in every German division, our privates with individual tents and personal luggage. In the spring of 1944, they made their way through the mud and overflowing rivers in felt boots and pants that did not fit. "Difficulties of material supply! - recalls the former chief of staff of the 37th army, General A.K. Blazhey. - Who could have known that about thirty percent of overcoats, trousers, tunics, leather boots and boots of the smallest sizes would go to army warehouses? Somewhere, apparently, the commissaries were wiser, experimenting, saving money, and a significant part of the soldiers had to step through the mud in felt boots. The general is modest, any military man knows what the "experiments" of the quartermasters are.

On the night of March 12, the OKH ordered the 8th and 6th armies to stop their withdrawal and stop the advance of the Soviet troops "at least" on the Southern Bug. The 4th and 1st Panzer Armies with counterattacks at the Ternopil-Proskurov line were supposed to disrupt the advance of the 1st Ukrainian Front to the flank and rear of Army Group South and save the position of the entire southern strategic grouping.

Zhukov's troops at that time, repelling the enemy's counterattacks at the Ternopol-Proskurov line and preparing to resume the offensive in the direction of the main attack, continued to conduct active hostilities on the flanks. On the left wing, the 18th Army, after fierce fighting, captured the city of Khmilnik, and the 38th

crossed the Southern Bug on the move and liberated Vinnitsa on March 20. On March 15, the troops of the right wing, simultaneously with the 2nd Belorussian Front, launched an offensive against Brody. The 13th Army, with the help of nine rifle divisions, with the support of the 25th Tank, 1st and 6th Guards Corps, broke through the defenses of the 13th Army Corps, liberated Dubno and Kremenets, and, advancing 80 km, by March 20 reached the approaches to Brody. Heavy fighting took place here with varying success.

Meanwhile, the troops of the 60th and 1st Guards Combined Arms, 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies repulsed the attacks of the enemy tank group in the areas of Ternopil, Volochisk, Proskurov. At the same time, the troops were preparing to continue the offensive. Grechko's army carried out a major regrouping, transferring three rifle corps from its left flank to the right. The 1st Panzer Army was moving into the zone of the 60th Army, the 106th Rifle Corps and two more divisions were approaching from the reserve. According to Katukov's memoirs, Chernyakhovsky and his staff did not arouse much enthusiasm for the new directives: "Preliminary negotiations with Ivan Danilovich about a breakthrough to the south did not inspire great hopes. Even such an impression was created that for Chernyakhovsky and his staff the forthcoming breakthrough was downright a sharp knife.

"You see," the commander said, "we haven't had time to recover even after the last battles. And then a new order - forward. At least give them a little break.

Ivan Danilovich and I calculated our combat resources. The breakthrough was to be deep, and we did not have powerful firepower."

On March 21, the main grouping of the 1st Ukrainian Front resumed its attack on Chernivtsi.



The troops of Chernyakhovsky and Grechko, with the assistance of three tank armies and the 4th Guards Tank Corps, broke the enemy defenses on the very first day and rushed south. Particularly successful were the units of Katukov's fresh tank army. Already on the morning of March 23, having advanced 120 km, they captured the important railway junction Chortkiv, and at 10 o'clock on March 24, the warheads of the 8th Guards Mechanized Corps of General Dremov reached the Dniester. To the left, the 11th Guards Tank Corps of Hetman and the 11th Rifle Corps of Major General I.T. Zamertseva. Tankers Dremov and Hetman crossed the Dniester on the move and rushed to the south. At a fast pace, having overcome the interfluvium of the Dniester and Prut, by 23 o'clock on March 25 they captured the Moshyn railway station, coming from the north to the approaches to Chernivtsi.

The Red commanders, as Katukov testifies, finally overcame the "encirclement" disease and linear thinking: "... the combat experience accumulated by the Soviet troops in offensive operations by this time largely predetermined the success of such a rapid advance. It is already important that tank and mechanized brigades have learned to solve combat missions without fear for their rear and flanks. For example, we were no longer afraid that the advanced tank units broke far ahead, leaving behind the surviving strongholds of the enemy.

Meanwhile, other units of the 1st Panzer Army bypassed the city from the west, cutting off the Germans' escape route. At noon on March 29, Chernivtsi was cleared of the enemy.

With their loss, the enemy lost the last link between his troops operating north and south of the Carpathians. For communication with the southern grouping, only the circumferential railways running through Romania remained. The strategic front of the German troops was cut into two parts. At the same time, the 1st German Panzer Army was finally cut off from the 4th Panzer Army.

After capturing Chernivtsi and Kolomyia, Katukov's troops continued active operations in the direction of Stanislav and Nadvirna. Having inflicted a defeat on the enemy in the foothills of the Carpathians, on April 8, units of the army reached the state border on a front of over 200 km.

The 4th Panzer Army was no less successful, developing success from the Volochysk region to the south. On March 26, units of the army, overcoming the fierce resistance of the 7th Panzer Division and the 1st SS Panzer Division "Adolf Hitler", broke into Kamenets-Podolsk.

The troops of the 1st Guards Army, having regrouped their main forces on the right flank, together with units of the 3rd Guards Tank Army, which still had 106 combat vehicles, struck northwest of Proskurov, and after three days having liberated the city, continued the offensive in the south in a western direction, trying, using the success of the 1st and 4th tank armies, to quickly reach the Kamenets-Podolsky region and stand in the way of retreat of the enemy's 1st tank army.

On March 28, Rybalko's tank army was withdrawn to the reserve for resupplying in order to prepare for the next stage - the capture of Lvov and Przemyśl.

By the end of March 30, Grechko's troops reached the Chemerovtsy-Smotrich line with three rifle corps.

As a result, the enemy's 4th Panzer Army was driven back to the west, to the Ozerna-Kozlov-Mariampol line, and part of the forces of this army was surrounded in Ternopil. The 1st Tank Army of Hube, acting with the main forces in front of the 1st Guards, 18th and 38th Armies, from the west was engulfed by our tank army of Lelyushenko.

The troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front at that time continued to cross the Southern Bug in almost the entire offensive zone. To build up the strike force, Konev brought the 6th Panzer Army into battle, which was tasked with crossing the river in the 27th Army's zone and advancing on Vapnyanka, Mogilev-Podolsky, and the cavalry corps from its reserve. Three tank armies, sweeping away enemy barriers on their way, destroying the rear of the enemy, rushed to the Dniester. On March 17, the advanced units of the troops of the right wing of the front reached the river and crossed it on the move south of Mogilev-Podolsky, mainly using improvised means. To the north of the city, by March 21, the 5th mechanized corps moved to the right bank in full force. As a result, the front of the Army Group "South" was broken in this direction as well. The right flank of the 1st German Panzer Army was driven back to the northwest, and the left flank of the 8th Army was driven back to the poop. On March 24, the German command was forced to transfer the 8th Army to Army Group A.

After the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front entered the Dniester and captured a large bridgehead on the right bank of the river - Headquarters, given that the advance of the 3rd Ukrainian Front was held back by strong enemy resistance on the lower reaches of the Southern Bug, ordered Konev to turn the main forces south for an offensive along the right and left banks of the Dniester, and part of the forces to continue the offensive to the west and south-west in order to reach the state border of the USSR with Romania. The thrust of the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front to the south was meant to cut off the escape routes beyond the Dniester to the 6th, 8th German and 3rd Romanian armies and to destroy them by the joint efforts of the two fronts.

The troops of the 27th and 52nd armies, pursuing the defeated enemy units in the interfluvium of the Dniester and the Prut, crossed the Reut River and by the end of March 25, advanced units were the first to reach the Prut River on the state border of the Soviet Union. Such an important event in Moscow was saluted in the first category. In the following days, the troops of these armies crossed the river and transferred the fighting to the territory of Romania.

On March 26, Marshal Antonescu wrote to Hitler: "Returning to my country today, I found that the situation looks completely different than it seemed to me when I was in the High Command of the Armed Forces."

While the troops of the right wing were crossing the Prut and advancing in the direction of Jassy, the troops of the left wing, the 5th and 7th Guards armies, were also successfully moving forward. On March 22, the army of General Zhadov and the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps liberated Pervomaisk. On March 29, the troops of the 53rd Army captured Balta.

Konev called this offensive the most difficult of his operations: "In my memory, pictures of overcoming impassable sticky mud by soldiers, officers and generals are indelible. I remember with what incredible difficulty the fighters pulled out cars stuck to the very bodies, guns sunk to the gun carriages in the mud, hoarsely roaring tanks covered with black earth. At that time, the main force was human.

German "colleagues" fully agree with the Soviet marshal: "Whoever has not seen the Russian mudslide does not know what mud is"

Tank armies suffered significant losses in materiel, mainly for technical reasons. On March 26, 48 tanks and self-propelled guns remained in the 2nd Tank Army, 16 in the 5th Guards, and 46 in the 6th Guards. . It was impossible to maneuver further. From Uman and Khristianovka, new vehicles went to the front under their own power.

The troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, pursuing the retreating enemy, on March 16-20 reached the Southern Bug and the approaches to Nikolaev and captured small bridgeheads in the areas south of Voznesensk, New Odessa on its right bank. It was not possible to force the Southern Bug on the move, as required by the Headquarters. The enemy, having managed to withdraw significant forces of his troops to the right bank of the river and to the Nikolaev region, created an organized defense on this advantageous line.

Almost the entire 4th Guards Mechanized Corps fell down, holding the crossings at Mikhailovka, and no longer represented a strike force: 9 tanks remained in service, in motorized rifle companies of 15-20 people, two commanders of tank brigades, the head of the operational department of the corps, several officers were killed management.

German positions on the outskirts of Nikolaev were equipped within five months. In total, there were four defensive lines in this direction, as well as an external defensive bypass of Nikolaev, which consisted of four more lines. There was everything that was supposed to be here: anti-tank ditches, full-profile trenches with communications, strong points, camouflaged firing positions, minefields, barbed wire. The armies of Zhadov and Grechkin were forced, step by step, to gnaw through a solid, well-organized defense, the saturation density of which with enemy troops, as a result of the retreat, continuously increased, its fire intensity increased, and resistance grew. But as they approached the city, the offensive zone of the Soviet troops narrowed, the battle formations became denser. On March 19, units of the mechanized corps of Sviridov approached the outer defensive contour of Nikolaev. Here the fighting took on a protracted character.

It is interesting that the reports of the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps for 20 days of fighting from Kherson to Nikolaev list killed and captured enemies, destroyed guns and vehicles, captured rifles and warehouses. But among all this scrupulously calculated damage that the tankers inflicted on the enemy, there is not a single tank. Didn't manage to knock out at least one? Or were they not at all? The history of the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps also does not mention a single collision with enemy armored vehicles. Marshal Chuikov directly notes that the enemy did not have tanks in the zone of action of his army.

The further advance of the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front was stopped, and Malinovsky failed to fulfill the directive of the Headquarters of March 11.

However, Hitler still decided to remove the commander of the 6th Army, Hollidt, and appointed General Heinrici in his place.

## LEAKY BOILER

In the meantime, the opportunity arose to "organize" another Stalingrad for the Germans.

As early as March 25, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief ordered Konev to quickly advance the 40th Army in the direction of Khotyn in order to cut off the enemy's 1st Tank Army's retreat across the Dniester. In pursuance of the order, the 40th Army crossed the Dniester west of Mogilev-Podolsky and, having launched an offensive along its southern coast, by March 30, one corps reached the approaches to Khotyn, deeply enveloping the Khube army from the south. The next day, the formations of the 4th Panzer Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front, advancing on the outer front, established contact with it. The flanks of the two fronts closed.

In the brewing "cauldron" northeast of Kamenetz-Podolsky, there were 10 infantry, 9 tank, 20th motorized and 18th artillery divisions, numbering about 200 thousand people. The length of the front line around the grouping of the 1st Panzer Army, which was squeezed in this area, was about 150 km.

The Soviet troops acted swiftly and boldly. Separate units, tank and mechanized units boldly broke through behind enemy lines, sowing panic and disorganizing his withdrawal. Manstein cites Hitler's reproach on this occasion: "... according to air reconnaissance, only individual enemy tanks were noted, from which entire military units of the Germans fled."

However, it was not possible to completely surround this grouping. Between the right flank of the 1st Guards Army, in the Chemerovtsy area, and the left flank of the 4th Tank Army, in the Lanckoruni area, there was a gap of up to 15 km. Lelyushenko's tank army, which formed the southwestern part of the encirclement front, suffered significant losses and had a little over 60 combat vehicles. The 30th Rifle Corps, transferred to it for reinforcement, had very little artillery and, moreover, was forced to deploy at the line indicated to it in the course of repulsing strong enemy attacks. The troops experienced an acute shortage of fuel, which was delivered only by air.

The 13th, 60th and 1st tank armies operated on the outer front of the encirclement. They were opposed by the troops of the 4th tank army of the enemy, numbering 14 divisions. At the same time, in the area between Ternopil and Stanislav, there were only small detachments of local commandant's offices, security and police formations, and on the southern bank of the Dniester, in front of Katukov's army, units of the 7th Hungarian army corps retreated.

The troops that went to the outer front did not organize a sufficiently strong defense, especially in the zone of the 18th Guards Rifle Corps, subordinate to Katukov. The reconnaissance was unsatisfactory. A sore point even in the spring of 1944 in the Red Army was the organization of communications and command and control in the offensive.

"If the corps commanders had at least two radio stations, and the division commanders had one each, everything would immediately fall into place," recalls General Blazhey. "But there are still not enough radio stations ... Even at the headquarters, out of nine full-time radio transmitters, only three are working ... It was required as air as a mobile unit on cars, but it was only possible to create it in the summer ... Mobile transmitting radio units, which were assembled from captured radio equipment on captured all-terrain vehicles. The brainchild of our signalmen was at that time a very valuable novelty in army practice.

Thus, although the Soviet troops managed to cut off large forces

the enemy and pinch them in a relatively small area north of Kamenetz-Podolsky, the conditions for the destruction of enemy troops were not created. Both the internal and external fronts were vulnerable, and in the most important places. Our troops, operating on the internal front, outnumbered the enemy, but did not have enough artillery and had already lost almost all the tanks. Combined-arms armies, advancing across difficult terrain and moving their artillery with great difficulty, did not have sufficient striking power for decisive action to dismember the enemy grouping, which included a large number of tank formations. Lelyushenko's tank army, significantly weakened - 67 tanks remained in it, and experiencing great difficulties in supplying ammunition and fuel, hardly repelled enemy attacks.

The German High Command took all possible measures to

to provide assistance to the troops defending in Ukraine. Fearing that Hungary would withdraw from the war, on March 19 the OKW ordered German troops to occupy its territory, and the Hungarian General Staff to form an additional eight divisions and send them to the command of the commander of Army Group South. At the same time, the 7th Hungarian Corps, which was part of the 4th Panzer Army, received the task of taking up defense along the Dniester in the area south of Kamenetz-Podolsky, north of Stanislav, and preventing the Red Army from breaking through to the Hungarian border. At the end of March, Hitler wrote to Antonescu with a letter in which he indicated that "it would be important to stop the Russians as far as possible from the borders of the allied states of the Southeast by exerting all forces and ... to organize a solid front." The defense along the upper reaches of the Prut was assigned to the Romanian troops. The Fuhrer demanded "to speed up the mobilization and deployment of the Romanian divisions and to withdraw every combat-ready formation ... in a northerly direction to the Prut." On April 2, the OKH issued Operational Order No. 7, the last order containing directives for a relatively long period of time. It demanded to stabilize the front: holding the Crimea, to gain a foothold on the line of the Dniester, Chisinau, Iasi, the eastern foothills of the Carpathians, Ternopil, Kovel. To organize the defense of Odessa, it was planned to hold a large bridgehead on the Dniester from Dubossary to the Tiligulsky estuary. Army Group South was given the task of withdrawing the 1st Panzer Army from encirclement.

In order to close the gap formed as a result of the breakthrough of the 1st Ukrainian Front and create a strong grouping for a counterattack in the last ten days of March and the first days of April, an infantry division and several divisions of self-propelled artillery were transferred from France, two divisions from Yugoslavia, a division from Romania, three divisions and one brigade from Hungary, as well as the 2nd SS Panzer Corps under the command of Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser. The main striking force of the corps was the new, well-equipped SS Panzer Divisions - the 9th Hohenstaufen and the 10th Frundsberg. Hitler gave the corps with great reluctance, since it was intended to repel an allied landing in Europe.

These troops were used to form a new defensive front between Ozerna and Stanislav, as well as to release the 1st Panzer Army. The transfer of formations and units from the Western European theater to the Eastern Front seriously weakened the anti-amphibious grouping of German troops there.

The scale of the regroupings and concentration of enemy troops in the area southeast of Lvov, as well as the change in the direction of withdrawal of the 1st Panzer Army, were not revealed in a timely manner by the command of the 1st Ukrainian Front. As a result, it did not take appropriate measures to reinforce the troops in the directions of attacks prepared by the enemy.

Under these conditions, Zhukov decided to intercept the enemy's withdrawal routes and destroy him with strikes from all sides. However, at the same time, the front command inaccurately determined the direction of the breakthrough of the enemy grouping. It believed that the German 1st Panzer Army would push south across the Dniester into Romania.

General Hube at first actually considered it most expedient to retreat south. This path seemed the easiest, although the prospect of crossing the Dniester and the withdrawal of an entire army with numerous equipment to the Carpathians promised very big troubles. Deciding to break through to the south, the army command took a number of security measures. In a number of places, crossings across the Dniester were built and strong cover detachments were sent to protect them. Separate units and some headquarters crossed to the right bank of the river.

Manstein believed that the 1st Panzer Army should retreat to the west in order to restore the front of defense in the Lvov direction: "Colonel-General Hube ... did not want to break through with the army to the west, but suggested taking it south across the Dniester.

It certainly was the easier way at the moment. To the west, she would have to fight her way through two enemy tank armies, and to the south she could leave at that time without serious fighting.

Nevertheless, I could not agree with this opinion of Colonel-General Hube. First, it was necessary that the 1st Panzer Army, moving west, would link up with the 4th Panzer Army. How else could the enemy break through into Galicia north of the Carpathians be prevented? An attempt by the army to slip south across the Dniester would, at best, have ended in being pushed back into the Carpathians, but this is also doubtful. Of course, the way south across the Dniester was at first less risky. However, a more detailed analysis showed that he led the army to destruction. She did not have crossing facilities and bridges to overcome the Dniester on a wide front. If she tried to cross over the few permanent bridges, she would lose the main part of her heavy equipment due to the actions of enemy aircraft. But more importantly, the enemy was advancing from the east already south of the Dniester. Sooner or later, the army would find itself between these advancing enemy forces and those of his two tank armies, which had just cut its communications and were about to force the Dniester in the rear of the army in a southerly direction.

The path to the south, according to Manstein, led to a dead end. At a meeting with Hitler in Obersalzberg, the field marshal threatened to resign if his proposals were not accepted, and also assured the Commander-in-Chief that "a breakthrough in the western direction will be successful, since both enemy tank armies will apparently disperse their forces in the direction of crossings across the Dniester."

The Fuhrer did not agree for a long time to authorize the withdrawal of the 1st Panzer Army, but in the end Hube received an order to break through precisely in the western direction to Chortkov, Buchach. At the same time, the Germans were preparing a counterattack towards the west from the area southeast of Lvov.

The breakthrough of the encircled group near Kamyanets-Podilsky was Manstein's last operation in World War II. He managed to prepare this operation, and it was already carried out by his successor Model. On March 30, Manstein was summoned to Hitler along with the commander of Army Group A, Field Marshal Kleist. The Fuhrer sent both of them into an honorable retirement, awarding them with the Swords to the Knight's Cross. He explained his decision as follows: "In the east, the time of large-scale operations, for which Manstein was especially suitable, has passed. Here it is important now to just stubbornly hold positions. The beginning of this new method of command and control of troops should be associated with a new name and a new motto. Hitler assured Manstein that he had no complaints against him, that he considered him one of his most capable commanders, but at the moment there were no worthy tasks for him. The Wehrmacht is no longer

masters of deep breakthroughs were required, the time for major maneuvering operations had passed forever.

Ahead of the field marshal was captivity, the verdict of the British tribunal, prison and Lost Victories. Ewald von Kleist, who was replaced by General Ferdinand Scherner, perished in a Soviet camp.

Four days later, Army Groups "A" and "South" were renamed into "Southern Ukraine" and "Northern Ukraine" groups. This was done, as Hitler put it, for "psychological reasons".

To get out of the encirclement, the command of the 1st Panzer Army created three groups. The northern and southern divisions included one infantry and one tank division each. The central group included five armored, motorized and infantry divisions. The rest of the formations had to hold back the stubborn rearguard battles

the onslaught of the Soviet troops and gradually retreat behind the breakthrough groups.

Zhukov's abilities were not enough to conduct a "more accurate analysis." Marshal Moskalenko emphasizes that "for all the difficulties in supplying the troops with ammunition and fuel, the front had forces capable of destroying the Kamenetz-Podolsk grouping of the Nazis. But for this, first of all, of course, it was necessary to use the 1st Panzer Army in a different way. It turned out that a powerful tank group of Germans assembled into a fist operated on the northern bank of the Dniester, and the best-equipped tank army of Katukov was on the south. There was also some "dizziness from success": the Soviet military leaders convinced themselves that the enemy had already been defeated, had lost the will to resist, and that "as a result of this, we will easily and quickly destroy the encircled group."

The command of the 1st Ukrainian Front, still believing that the enemy would retreat to the south, and unaware of the appearance of the SS Panzer Corps, directed the main efforts of the troops at the end of March to cut off the enemy from the crossings on the Dniester and capture them. Even the persistent attacks of the Germans in the western direction and the fact that Lelyushenko's army and the 30th rifle corps attached to it could hardly hold back the blows were seen as the enemy's desire to "leak" to the crossings in the village of Zalizhchyky.

Zhukov's order, issued on the night of March 29, said: "The enemy's Dunaev grouping is completely surrounded. During March 27, 28, the group tried to break through in the general direction through Kamenetz-Podolsky beyond the river. Dniester...

On March 29, we should expect a decisive attempt by the enemy to break through Kamenets-Podolsky to Khotyn ...

I order: the armies continue the rapid offensive and complete the defeat of the encircled enemy grouping on March 31.

To do this, Lelyushenko received an order to defeat the Germans in the Lanckoruni area and, going on the defensive at the Cherkash-Kamianets-Podolsky-Kitaygorod line, in no case prevent the enemy from breaking through to the Dniester. The 1st Guards Army, having the main grouping on its right flank, was to continue the offensive in the direction of Smotrych - Kamenetz-Podolsky. The 18th and 38th armies are also to deliver concentric strikes.

On March 31, the encircled German group, pushing forward tank divisions, broke through the defenses of the 4th Guards Tank Army with a ram attack. Lelyushenko held the city, through which the only paved road passed to the west, although there was a moment when officers of the army headquarters and the political department had to take part in hand-to-hand combat: "I still remember how G.K. had to interrupt his report three times. Zhukov by radio in connection with the enemy's breakthrough to the command post of the 4th Panzer Army. The front commander at that moment said: "Go, lead the repulse of the attack, I hope that you will not be taken prisoner, and then you will report." Zhukov

in general, with all the subordinates, he was on "you".

Bypassing Kamenetz-Podolsky from the north, the main enemy forces retreated to Borshchev. The front headquarters, continuing to believe that the enemy was trying to break through to the south, beyond the Dniester, continued to direct all efforts to cut off the Germans from the crossings. Everyone was so sure that the position of the 1st Panzer Army was hopeless that on the morning of April 2, an ultimatum was presented to it by radio, demanding to capitulate within two days.

It is curious that Soviet history simply omits this fact and therefore does not provide the text of this remarkable Zhukovsky appeal, which, according to

veterans of the Wehrmacht, led them to complete amazement: in the event of the continuation of the "senseless resistance", the marshal promised to shoot every third captured. Two hours later, an amendment followed: "Only those commanders will be shot, and before the formation of their units, who, despite the fact that the Marshal's proposal is addressed to them, refuse to stop resistance ... They will be punished for the senseless shedding of blood of the troops entrusted to them."

On April 4, when a response to the ultimatum was expected, Hube again struck in a westerly direction. Having crossed the Seret River along two bridges captured by a swift blow, the Germans cut the railway and the Chortkiv-Zaleshchyky highway, and with them the communications of Katukov's tank army. To intercept the enemy's retreat routes, Zhukov decided to use the 52nd and 74th rifle corps, which were on the march in the Buchach-Tlumach region, to regroup the 4th tank army from Kamenetz-Podolsky, and then several more divisions from the 1st Guards, 18th and 38th armies. However, all these units, thrown into battle from the march on a wide front, almost without artillery, were thrown back by a tank wedge.

On the morning of April 5, the enemy went on the offensive on the outer front. On the way of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps, which struck in the main direction, south of Podgait, two divisions of the 18th Guards Rifle Corps, Lieutenant General I.M. Afonina. They failed to stop the enemy. The Germans pressed the Soviet units to the river, and the latter managed to avoid complete destruction only because pontoons were brought from the right bank, on which the remains of the hull were evacuated.

On April 7, in the Buchach area, the vanguards of the SS corps connected with the advanced units of the 1st Panzer Army.

Pursuing the units of Hube emerging from the encirclement, the troops of the 1st Guards and 4th Tank Armies reached this area and made an attempt to develop the offensive in a westerly direction. The Germans sought to push them back to the east. Fierce ten-day battles ended in vain. Soviet troops entrenched themselves at the turn of Zolotniki - Buchach - the mouth of the Strypa River. The Germans firmly closed the gap north of the Dniester.

The fact that the enemy outplayed him, as well as the fact that the situation in the western direction got out of control of the front command, was also recognized by Zhukov himself: "Having crushed the defenses of the 18th Corps and the 1st Guards Army, the enemy's tank group rushed to the Buchach area towards their units emerging from the encirclement. How many Nazis broke through from the encirclement, neither I nor the front headquarters could accurately determine. There were different numbers. As it turned out later, it was not dozens of tanks with landing troops that emerged from the encirclement, as the troops then reported, but much more.

So after all, Zhukov himself probably reported on the complete destruction of the 1st German tank army.

By the way, it was on these days, specifically on April 10, 1944, that Zhukov was awarded the highest military order "Victory" number 1. Vasilevsky was awarded the same order number 2. The wording of the decree was the same for both: "For the skillful fulfillment of the tasks of the Supreme High Command for the leadership of combat

large-scale operations, as a result of which outstanding successes were achieved in the defeat of the Nazi troops ... "

In the first half of April, there were heavy battles in the Ternopil direction. Troops of the 60th Army, with the forces of the 15th Rifle Corps, already on March 24 surrounded the garrison of Ternopil - 12,000 people with 145 guns, and parts of the 23rd, 28th and 106th corps



advanced 15-20 km west of the city, forming the outer front of the encirclement.

The enemy, surrounded in Ternopil, surrounded the city with a network of defensive structures and turned stone buildings into fortified strongholds. The city was declared a "fortress". The order emphasized that in Ternopil the Germans were defending the "borders of Germany." Soviet troops presented an ultimatum to the German garrison, but it was rejected.

For the assault on the city, the 94th Rifle and 4th Guards Tank Corps were brought up. The battles with the encircled enemy lasted more than half a month.

In mid-April, the German command tried to come to the rescue of the Ternopil garrison. Three infantry divisions, having crossed Strypa 20 km west of the city, pressed the Soviet units, and then the 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen was introduced to the bridgehead. To eliminate the threat that had arisen to help the infantry, Zhukov transferred the 6th Guards Tank Corps from the reserve, Lieutenant General A.P. Panfilov, additional artillery, the 91st Tank Brigade and the 11th Guards Tank Regiment - 22 IS-2 heavy vehicles. Fresh units managed to arrive on time and organize a competent layered defense in the direction of a probable enemy strike along the highway and railway to Ternopil: they dug in tanks, organized artillery ambushes, set mines

fields.

The German attack began on 15 April shortly after noon. The SS men, not expecting to meet a strong, and even tank, defense, walked as if in a parade. "The picture was impressive," recalls General V.S. Arkhipov. - Between the railway and the highway, turning around at the front of 2-2.2 km, more than a hundred tanks were moving towards us. They walked in company columns, 15-17 vehicles each, in front of the "tigers", followed by lighter "panthers", in the tail of each column - 5-6 armored personnel carriers with infantry. Rarely have I seen such a battle formation in an attack - usually the German infantry followed the tanks, but here they go in armored personnel carriers, not even spreading out. Maybe this is so that the infantry immediately, along with the tanks, crashes into our battle formations? Or maybe the 9th Panzer, which had just arrived from France, only theoretically imagined the difference between the fighting in 1939-1940 and on the Eastern Front in 1944? Be that as it may, but such a formation of the attackers is deadly, first of all, for themselves ... When they reached a distance of 400-500 meters, I commanded over the radio: "Fire!" The missiles duplicated the team. Well, it began, and the fire-smoke carousel began to spin! From above, from the sky, as if the Ila attack aircraft had fallen and went to comb the tank columns. The heavy cannons of the IS-2 tanks were deafeningly beaten, armor-piercing shells cut even the powerful frontal armor of the "tigers". Enemy tanks burned with light smoke, rubber tires on armored personnel carriers burned with black smoke. Bonfires above the armor flared up here and there across the entire two-kilometer width of the field. After some confusion, the fascist tanks began to disperse, went to the right and left, others - somewhere down, hiding in the hollows. But there they were met either by mines laid by sappers ... or direct fire from ambushes.

The battle lasted exactly one day. Panfilov's tankers repelled all attacks. On April 16, Ternopil was taken by decisive assault, only

a small part of the garrison, the commandant of the "fortress" General Neudorf died. In the evening of the same day, under the cover of artillery preparation, the Hohenstaufen division secretly withdrew from its positions and left for Strypa.

Intense fighting unfolded south of the Dniester, where on a wide front

the tank army of Katukov operated. In early April, units of the army reached the Nadvirna area and the approaches to Stanislav. The 1st Guards Tank Brigade broke into the city with a night attack, but was driven out by the enemy in the morning. In our sources, he is stubbornly referred to as "Nazis", although, apart from the 21st Hungarian Infantry Division, there was no one else there.

The Hungarians, who at one time willingly took part in the division of Czechoslovakia and the invasion of Yugoslavia, got involved in the war with the Soviet Union without much desire. Transylvania, transferred to Romania in 1918, attracted them much more. "It was known that our allies - both Hungarians and Romanians - looked at each other with such distrust that they kept their best parts inside the country in order to have them at hand in case of need."

The successes of the Wehrmacht in the first period fueled the enthusiasm of the Hungarian government, and it, fearing to be late in the division of the pie, allocated an entire army of 200,000 people to the holy cause of "fighting Bolshevism". However, Stalingrad gave the impression of a cold shower. During the January offensive of 1943, the Red Army utterly defeated the 2nd Hungarian Army on the Don. According to Regent Miklos Horthy's admission in a letter to Hitler, the army lost 80,000 officers and men killed and 63,000 wounded. Hungarian troops were withdrawn from the front.

The government, meanwhile, "just in case" established secret contacts with London and Washington. The Hungarians left only a few divisions in Ukraine. Moreover, they were given strict instructions not to participate in hostilities. Their tasks were limited to the protection of railways and highways from partisans in the rear areas. Thus, if the Wehrmacht retreated, then its "vanguard" was the Hungarian DIVISIONS.

However, with the withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Carpathians, the Germans were no longer satisfied with such an ambivalent position of the ally. Germany needed Hungarian resources, Hungarian industry, Hungarian soldiers. Called to Horthy's Headquarters, Hitler declared on March 17 that "he, taught by the bitter experience of Italy, will take measures to prevent such events in the Danube basin." To ensure the "loyalty" of Hungary on the night of March 18-19, 11 German divisions entered the country from the territory of Austria and Romania. Although right now at the front they would certainly have been more useful than the Hungarian ones, but this was again a "political issue". Operation "Margaret G" took only 12 hours. The Hungarian army completely came under German control.

March 23 1st Hungarian Army, numbering 8 infantry and 1 tank division, was subordinated to the command of Army Group South. The task of protecting the Carpathians and the region between the mountain range and the upper Dniester was entrusted to the Hungarians.

Marshal Zhukov, having missed Khube, began the transfer of troops to the southern bank of the Dniester to attack Stanislav. On April 12, the administration of the 38th Army was relocated here, which took over the leadership of the actions of four rifle corps. General Moskalenko was appointed "senior commander in the Stanislav direction", the 1st Panzer Army was subordinate to him as a "reinforcement army". In a hurry, there was an understaffing of parts. It was planned to start on April 21-22.

However, on April 17, the enemy went on the offensive. The 101st Light Infantry Division, supported by the armored vehicles of the 17th Tank Division, was the first to strike from the bridgehead in the Nizhny region after strong artillery and aviation preparation. On

the next day, the Germans additionally introduced units of the 6th Panzer and two infantry divisions into the battle. South of Stanislav, the 7th Hungarian Corps and the 2nd Hungarian Panzer Division launched an offensive. Fierce fighting continued until the beginning of May. Behind

four days the enemy managed to push the Soviet units 30-40 km to the south and south East.

The battle culminated on 20 April. The enemy brought into battle over 200 tanks and assault guns. TOGETHER WITH HUNGARIANS???

Two army commanders, acting side by side, left colorful memories of this day. The beginning of these stories is almost identical, only the endings turned out to be different, like the movie "Intergirl".

Katukov recalls how he asked for help from the front commander and Zhukov promised to give support:

"Soon, the army received two self-propelled tank regiments, armed with 122- and 152-mm guns. These regiments have just arrived at the front. Somewhere in the interior of the country they were formed and manned. The crews of self-propelled artillery installations did not yet have combat experience, but there was no doubt about their durability. The mood of the personnel in the regiments was upbeat.

That's just to learn them, to pass on the experience of the frontline ... But before that, when you expect a fascist counterattack from hour to hour. The Nazis launched their first attacks on Obertyn, a major road junction northeast of Kolomyia, covering the approaches to the Dniester crossings....

Soon, near the village of Nezvisko, the Nazis ran into self-propelled tank regiments sent to us by Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov. The meeting with Soviet self-propelled guns was a complete surprise for the enemy. A fierce battle ensued. "Tigers", "Panthers" and other fascist tanks came under crossfire from self-propelled guns.

122- and 152-mm self-propelled artillery mounts won the battle, 70 enemy tanks blazed like fire torches near Nevisco. The Nazis rolled back and stopped counterattacks along the entire front in Northern Bukovina.

Self-propelled tank regiments completed their task. True, in a bloody fleeting battle, they also suffered significant losses. Mainly because the crews of self-propelled artillery mounts participated in the battle for the first time. They did not have real experience to mask their actions, they had not yet learned how to quickly change positions, beat the enemy with the favorite method of tankers - from ambushes.

Marshal of the Soviet Union G.K. Someone reported to Zhukov that the command of the 1st Tank Army was incorrectly using the self-propelled guns attached to it. The regiments went out of order, allegedly losing many cars in vain.

An investigation has begun.

"You will have to answer for the ruined self-propelled guns," the chairman of a specially sent commission declared categorically. - What are you responsible for? I tried to object. - Because the situation demanded

immediate entry of regiments into battle? Is it really possible to transfer to unfired self-propelled soldiers the practical front-line experience of tankers, accumulated by them during the three years of the war, in two hours?

But my arguments to the commission did not make much of an impression. I don't know how everything would have turned out if G.K. had not come to our sector of the front. Zhukov.

We met the commander. The conversation was harsh at first.

— What have you done here? Ruined self-propelled tank regiments? G.K. asked harshly. Zhukov.

Instead of excuses, we saw the commander off near Nevisco, on the field of a battle that had just died down, where the skeletons of 70 burned-out fascist tanks were still smoking.

"The self-propelled tank regiments did it," I said.

Georgy Konstantinovich stood silently for a long time.

"I understand," he said at last, and went to the car.

The investigation was terminated. As the largest military leader who has seen a lot in the three years of the war, G.K. Zhukov realized that the truth is on our side."

Such a coincidence: Commander-38 also asked Zhukov for reinforcements and also received two regiments:

"Destroyer anti-tank regiments fought skillfully and heroically. High fighting qualities were demonstrated by those sent by G.K. Zhukov, heavy IS tanks armed with a 122-mm cannon, and self-propelled guns armed with 152-mm cannons. Both regiments were immediately put into action by me upon their arrival.

Here I first saw them in battle. They were less manoeuvrable than the T-34s, but what a great performance these powerful combat vehicles had! Calmly, confidently bringing the tanks out of cover, the crews stopped them, slowly took aim and fired shots. After each shot, its result was checked and then, just as calmly, slowly, they took the cars into cover. Having made a maneuver, they reappeared, and everything started all over again...

Over half of the 68 enemy tanks knocked out and destroyed in the battles on April 20 were on the account of the crews of the IS and self-propelled guns.

We had one tank out of order that day."

I understand that memoirs are a subjective thing, but not so much! After all, apparently, eyewitnesses describe the same battle, even the number of destroyed German tanks is almost the same. Or did the front commander give each army commander two regiments? In this case, the artilleryman Moskalenko used them much more effectively than the master of tank attacks Katukov.

It is strange, but, remembering the two self-propelled regiments, Katukov completely forgot that on the night of April 19-20, he received the 6th Guards Mechanized Corps from the 4th Tank Army.

Both sides were building up their forces, but Zhukov had more opportunities for this. Another rifle corps and the administration of the 18th Army, two anti-tank brigades, and several artillery regiments were transferred to the southern bank of the Dniester. Katukov received another 213 units of armored vehicles, including brand new T-34-85s, which he immediately threw into the attack: "The crews who received the new T-34s had to be given two hours to master them. We couldn't give more than. The situation on the ultra-wide front was such that new tanks with more powerful weapons had to be brought into battle as soon as possible.

As the saying goes, "there is no reception against scrap." The enemy could no longer oppose this tactic. By the beginning of May, his offensive had fizzled out, and a lull had set in on the Stanislav ledge. Soviet troops held the line from the mouth of the Strypa River, west of Kolomyia, Kuta. But Zhukov also failed to complete the task 100% - Lviv and Przemyśl remained with the Germans.

Katukov became a colonel general, and his army became the 1st Guards Tank Army.

The troops of the left wing of the 2nd Ukrainian Front more and more deeply covered the enemy grouping operating between the Southern Bug and the Dniester from the north, and created a threat of its encirclement. In order to delay the advance of Soviet troops in the Kishinev direction, the enemy was forced to transfer part of the forces of the 6th Army, which weakened its defenses in front of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. By mid-April, the troops of the left wing of the 2nd Ukrainian Front reached the Dniester east of Chisinau. Here they met an organized defense at pre-prepared lines.

In order to close the huge gap that appeared as a result of the defeat of the 8th Army, to stop the advance of Soviet troops in Romania and to prevent the threat of encirclement of the coastal group, the German command was forced to make significant regroupings. The 4th Romanian Army, Antonescu's last reserve, advanced to the Iasi region - eight divisions and one brigade. Seven more Romanian divisions and two brigades were transferred to the Chisinau direction to reinforce the 8th German Army. Three divisions, including two Romanian, arrived in the 8th Army from Army Group A. In total, from March 21 to the end of April, against the 2nd Ukrainian Front, the army and eight corps directorates, 18 divisions and three brigades were transferred from Romania and Army Group A.

Enemy resistance in the Iasi and Kishinev directions increased. At the same time, while conducting an offensive in conditions of complete lack of roads, the troops of the front stretched out, the rear and a significant part of the artillery lagged behind, the armies suffered heavy losses, and the supply of troops deteriorated. In addition, the 3rd Ukrainian Front lagged behind the schedule, whose troops were supposed to go to the area south of Chisinau and assist in capturing the city.

Konev suggested going on the defensive.

On May 6, the Headquarters confirmed this decision by directive.

## POLESSKY OPERATION

Significant assistance to the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front in defeating the northern flank of the Army Group "South" was provided by the 2nd Belorussian Front, which carried out the Polesky operation.

The successful offensive of the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the advance of its right wing far to the west created favorable conditions for the development of an offensive towards Kovel. Since this direction was considered independent, on February 17, 1944, the Stavka formed the 2nd Belorussian Front under the command of Colonel General P.A. Kurochkin as part of the 61st, 70th, 47th combined-arms and 6th air armies, the 2nd and 7th guards cavalry corps, the Dnieper River Flotilla - 19 rifle, 6 cavalry divisions, 1 separate tank brigade, 3 separate tank regiments.

According to the instructions of the Stavka on March 4, the front was to organize an offensive to the west with the immediate task of defeating the enemy's Kovel grouping. In the future, it was planned to take control of Brest, go to the Western Bug, and go to the Pripjat River with the right wing.

The main blow was to be delivered by the 47th Army of Lieutenant General V.S. Polenov bypassing Kovel from the north and south. The 70th "Chekist" Army, Lieutenant General I.F., arrived from the reserve.

Nikolaeva was supposed to advance from the bridgeheads on the Stokhid River to Kamen-Kashirsky with the task of cutting the Brest Kovel highway and preventing the enemy from attacking from the Brest direction. 61st Army Lieutenant General P.A. Belov was to clear the southern coast of Pripjat from the enemy, capturing the cities of Turov, David-Gorodok, Rubel, Stolin.

The offensive was ordered to begin, "without waiting for the full concentration of the troops of the front."

In general, the whole idea looks somewhat adventurous. Twenty-two days were allotted to General Kurochkin from the moment the directive was given to create a new front until the moment of the attack. Only Belov's army and the 77th Rifle Corps, transferred from the 13th Army, were present on the spot. Everything else was yet to be received,

concentrate, provide everything necessary, put together headquarters, prepare troops for the offensive. To organize, for example, the 47th Army, it was necessary to receive three divisions from Zhukov, a rifle corps from the Stavka reserve, and wait for army command from the 2nd Ukrainian Front.

The concentration of troops arriving from the reserve took place along a single railway. They unloaded in the Sarny area, from where they set out in marching order. But Stalin was in a hurry, and Kurochkin began the operation on time, having 13 divisions at his disposal. The rest came up and joined the fights along the way; three divisions and three independent tank regiments never arrived.

In the front line from Stolin to Lutsk, the troops of the 2nd Army of Army Group Center were defending - the 7th Infantry Division, the battle groups Hanle and Agricola and six infantry battalions; part of the forces of the 4th Panzer Army - the 213th security division, groups Bille and Goof, as well as police and security units. In the immediate rear were two Hungarian infantry divisions.

During the first half of March, the troops of the 2nd Belorussian Front were regrouping. The main forces of the 47th and 70th armies were drawn up to the line of the Stokhid River, and their forward detachments, knocking down small groups of the enemy, crossed to the western bank and occupied bridgeheads in a number of places.

On March 15, the offensive of the army of Polenov and Nikolaev was launched. On March 16, the main forces of the 61st Army went on the attack in the Stolin direction.

Operating in extremely difficult conditions of wooded and swampy terrain, the 47th and 70th armies advanced 30-40 km by March 18. They were opposed by the 213th security division. The Germans were thrown back behind Kovel, and the city's garrison was blocked by five rifle divisions of the 47th Army. In Kovel, they found themselves surrounded by units of the consolidated group of Bach, a regiment of a security division and police units. Despite all the Soviet attacks, the "fortress" held out.

The German command understood that the breakthrough to Kovel and Brest led the Red Army to the deep rear of Army Group Center, and took urgent measures

to strengthen the defense in this direction. In the last ten days of March - in the first days of April, the Germans additionally transferred the Viking SS Panzer Division, the 4th Panzer Division, four infantry divisions, and five brigades of self-propelled guns to the 2nd Belorussian Front.

As these troops arrived, enemy resistance increased. Its defense was facilitated by a heavily swampy area with a large number of rivers. Starting from March 23, the enemy launched several strong counterattacks, trying to unblock the Kovel garrison. On April 4, the Viking division managed to break through to the city, push back the Soviet units and stabilize the situation in this area. The troops of the 47th Army entrenched themselves on the outskirts of Kovel, the 70th Army went on the defensive on the outskirts of Ratno.

On the right wing of the front, the 61st Army did not advance a single step.

Thus, the 2nd Belorussian Front did not fulfill any of the assigned tasks and was abolished on April 5th. During the 42 days of its existence, the front lost 22,263 people killed, wounded and sick. Of these, exactly half are in the Polessky operation.

Ten days later, Colonel General Kurochkin was appointed commander of the 60th Army, which he commanded until the end of the war.

On April 17, 1944, the strategic offensive of the Soviet troops on the Right-Bank Ukraine, which lasted almost continuously for 4 months, ended with the defeat of the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front of Germany (with the exception of the 17th Army blocked in the Crimea). It was one of the largest operations

World War II, unfolding on the front with a length of up to 1300-1400 km. About 4 million people, 45.4 thousand guns and mortars, 4.2 thousand tanks and self-propelled guns (lies) took part in the battles in the Right-Bank Ukraine on both sides. This is the only operation in which all six tank armies acted simultaneously from the Soviet side. During the offensive, ten divisions and one brigade of Army Groups "South" and "A" were destroyed, 59 of their divisions lost from 50 to 70 percent of their personnel and equipment.

Soviet troops advanced 250-450 km and, reaching the foothills of the Carpathians, cut the southern wing of the enemy's strategic front.

"By the end of the operations of the second Stalinist strike, Soviet troops advanced to the Kovel-Tarnopol-Balti-Ananyev line ... The entire Right-Bank Ukraine was liberated from the Nazi invaders. The strategic success of the Second Stalinist strike created the prerequisites for decisive operations to liberate Belarus and develop an offensive in the Lvov direction, towards the Balkans, Odessa and the Crimea. The troops of the Soviet Army, deeply wedged into the enemy's position, were able to inflict new blows on the German Army Group Center in Belarus and liberate the coast of the Black Sea and Crimea.

This victory of the Soviet troops became possible thanks to the wise Stalinist strategy, the growing economic power of the country and the nationwide assistance to the front, the organizational and leading role of the Bolshevik Party, the high morale and offensive impulse of the Soviet troops and equipping them with first-class weapons.

The Germans ceded territory, but did not allow themselves to be surrounded and destroyed.

Manstein: "The enemy was not able to surround the entire southern wing of the Eastern Front, which allowed him to do the operational situation and his multiple superiority. True, we had to cede vast areas to the enemy, and at the same time the strength of our troops continued to decrease, but we prevented the enemy from taking a decisive step towards victory! Army Group South, although bleeding with thousands of wounds, has retained its combat capability!

In the battles for the liberation of the Right-Bank Ukraine, the troops of five fronts lost 1,200,000 people killed and wounded in four months (almost 100 fully equipped divisions), about 5,000 tanks and self-propelled guns (once again to the question of the lack of tanks), and here we are talking about irretrievable losses, 8,000 guns and mortars; over 700 aircraft.

### THIRD STALIN IMPACT

"... inflicted by the troops of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Ukrainian fronts and the Separate Primorsky Army in cooperation with the Black Sea Fleet in April-May, completed the liberation from the German-Romanian invaders of the entire Black Sea coast - from Kerch to the Dniester Estuary" .

This strike includes the Odessa and Crimean operations. The Odessa operation, in essence, was a continuation of the Snigirev operation of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. But it was ordered to "classify" it as "the first stage of the third Stalinist strike and the further development of the success of the second Stalinist strike on the Black Sea coast." The Crimean operation constitutes the second stage of Stalin's third strike.

### ODESSA OPERATION

After a heavy defeat in the Bereznegovato-Snigirevskaya operation, the German troops managed to retreat beyond the Southern Bug and stop the advance of the 3rd Ukrainian Front at this line. On the left bank of the Southern Bug, they held Nikolaev. However, the rapid offensive of the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front in the Uman-Botoshansky operation, which reached the approaches to Iasi and Chisinau, deeply covering the enemy's coastal grouping from the northwest, forced the German command to transfer part of the forces from the Southern Bug to the Chisinau direction.

Under these conditions, the troops of General Malinovsky were ordered, after a short preparation, to resume the general offensive in order to defeat the enemy's coastal grouping between the Southern Bug and Dniester rivers, to liberate the northwestern coast of the Black Sea with the largest port and the city of Odessa.

The idea provided for the main attack by four right-flank armies - the 57th, 37th, 46th and 8th Guards - with a total of 38 rifle, two artillery divisions, the Pliev group and the 23rd tank corps in the Voznesensk, Novaya Odessa zone on Zhovten, Tiraspol, Razdelnaya in the coverage of the enemy grouping from the northwest. The largest bridgehead was captured northwest of Voznesensk. It had a fairly large operational capacity, had convenient approaches to the river and exits to its right bank. The enemy here was weak and could not offer significant resistance.

After the liberation of Nikolaev, the 6th and 5th shock armies were to develop the offensive along the coast and attack Odessa from the northeast with the help of 14 divisions. After the capture of Nikolaev, the 28th Army was planned to be withdrawn to the Stavka reserve.



With the successful implementation of this plan, the 6th German and 3rd Romanian armies pressed against the Black Sea and fell under the threat of encirclement and complete defeat.

By March 28, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front included 57 rifle and three cavalry divisions, a tank and mechanized corps - 470,000 people, 12,678 guns and mortars, 435 tanks and self-propelled guns, 436 combat aircraft.

The opposing troops of the 6th German and 3rd Romanian armies by this time had 20 divisions (16 German and 4 Romanian), two tank battalions, eight brigades of assault guns. They numbered 350,000 men, about 3,200 guns and mortars, 160 tanks and assault guns. In this direction, the enemy could use up to 550 combat aircraft of the 1st Aviation Corps of the 4th Air Fleet of the Germans and the Romanian Aviation Corps.

On March 26, the armies of the right wing and the center of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, after artillery preparation, began to force the Southern Bug and break through the enemy's defenses on the western bank. The left-flank armies began the assault on Nikolaev.

As a result of three days of fighting, the 57th and 37th armies, using the success of Konev's left-flank armies, expanded the bridgehead to 45 km along the front and from 4 to 25 km in depth.

Seeing success on the right flank, Malinovsky made adjustments to the operation plan. The horse-mechanized group and the 23rd tank corps - 225 tanks and self-propelled guns, located in the area northwest of Novaya Odessa, in the zone of the 46th army, it was decided to immediately regroup in the zone of the 57th and 37th armies.

At this time, the troops of the 6th, 5th shock, 28th armies and the 2nd guards mechanized corps fought hard battles in the Nikolaev area.

To assist the troops advancing from the front in capturing the city, General Grechkin ordered the landing of marines in the port of Nikolaev with

the task of starting a battle in the rear of the German troops, by surprise actions to cause a commotion among them and divert part of the enemy forces from the front. The task was assigned to the 384th separate battalion of the Marine Corps, Major F.E. Kotanova. For the landing, 55 volunteers were selected, led by the commander of the detachment, senior lieutenant K.F. Olshansky.

Having repaired seven old fishing boats found in the village of Oktyabrsky and taking a local fisherman A.N. Andreev, the detachment on the night of March 26 moved up the Southern Bug. Immediately before the landing, two signalmen and ten sappers from a separate engineering battalion of the 28th Army were included in the landing force. Due to the oncoming storm wind, the 15-kilometer path was overcome in more than five hours. Due to a delay on the way, the sappers, after the completion of mine clearance, could not return to their location before dawn and, together with the guide, remained in the detachment. These paratroopers are involuntarily referred to in the official history of the Soviet Navy as "Red Army snipers."

At 04:15 on March 26, the marines secretly landed at the trading port, removed the guards and, having occupied several buildings, organized a circular defense in the area of the elevator. In the morning, the enemy tried to destroy the landing force with small forces, but was rebuffed. Then the Germans brought new forces into battle, pulled up

artillery, six-barreled mortars, used flamethrowers. The paratroopers fought to the death. In two days they repelled 18 attacks and killed almost all of them.

For these two days, the troops of the three armies gnawed through the German defenses and could not provide any support to the marines.

Finally, on the night of March 28, the 61st Guards and 243rd Rifle Divisions from the 6th Army crossed the Ingul under heavy enemy fire using improvised means and broke into Nikolaev from the north. The breakthrough of these divisions violated the stability of the enemy defense. Not allowing the enemy to come to his senses, the Soviet units made their way to the city center by 4 o'clock. At the same time, units of the 5th shock army entered the city from the east. Troops of the 28th Army and Sviridov's mechanized corps advanced on the city from the south.

By this time, 11 people survived from the landing. A handful of wounded sailors, led by foreman of the 2nd article Kirill Bochkovich, held their positions until the morning of March 28, when Soviet troops advancing from the front broke into the Nikolaev port. From a military point of view, the landing failed and had no effect on the course of the operation, but its actions entered the history of the Patriotic War as an example of military prowess.

And also as an example of the soullessness of our military bureaucratic machine.

55 marines on the list received the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. 12 "Red Army snipers", they are also signalmen and sappers, did not receive anything, since they were absent from the list of the airborne detachment. Moreover, the names of most of them remained unknown. But it was not the 41st year, and we were advancing. Interestingly, although the entire detachment consisted of 68 people and the memories of one of the surviving participants in the landing are called "We were 68", one of the squares of Nikolaev bears the name of 67 heroes, since the deceased guide Andreev was recognized as a Hero only in 1965.

As a result of the efforts of the three armies, by the morning of March 28, the Soviet troops completely cleared Nikolaev, a major port and an important center of shipbuilding. Nineteen Soviet divisions defeated three German ones.

On March 29, the 28th Army and the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps were put into reserve.

5th air field, 302nd and 304th infantry divisions of the enemy, holding

Nikolaev, with heavy losses, were driven back to the western bank of the Southern Bug.

The breakthrough of the defense on the flanks of the coastal group and the threat of troops from the 2nd Ukrainian Front entering the rear of it forced General Scherner to begin the withdrawal of his armies beyond the Dniester. The aircraft of the 17th Air Army delivered massive strikes against the retreating columns. At the same time, two fighter divisions covered the crossing of the 23rd Panzer Corps and the cavalry-mechanized group in the Aleksandrovka area. The crossing was carried out on one pontoon bridge with a carrying capacity of 30 tons and therefore dragged on for a long time. It was completed only on the morning of March 30th.

Once on the western bank, tankers and Cossacks rushed to catch up with the divisions of Hagen and Sharokhin, who had already reached the Tiligul River.

On the left flank, along the Black Sea coast, the troops of the 5th Shock Army were successfully advancing. On March 30, units of the 1st Guards Fortified Region, the forward detachment of the 295th Infantry Division and units of the Black Sea Fleet combined

Ochakov was liberated by a blow from land and sea.

The German command, fearing the encirclement of the 6th Army and trying to quickly withdraw it from the blow, took all measures to delay the advance of the Soviet troops at the turn of the Tiligul River. Here the Germans prepared defensive positions in advance, which were occupied by retreating units. The swampy banks of the river and its swampy bottom were a strong obstacle for the advancing. However, despite the stubborn resistance of the enemy rearguards, the troops of Sharokhin and the cavalry mechanized group crossed the river on March 31 and knocked the enemy down from the heights of the right bank. Here, during an air raid, the commander of the 4th mechanized corps, General Tanaschishin, was killed. Major General V.I. took command. Zhdanov.

The advance of the Soviet troops after crossing the Tiligul River became even more complicated, since the past rains completely ruined the roads. Mobile groups operated in infantry combat formations. German aviation in groups of 30-40 aircraft systematically bombed the battle formations of the troops. Rifle and mechanized troops experienced acute difficulties with ammunition and fuel. Therefore, the 17th Air Army had to allocate an increasing number of aircraft to deliver urgent cargo to the troops.

On April 4, Pliev's group captured the Razdelnaya station, cutting off the railway linking Odessa with Tiraspol. The Cossacks, supported by tanks, attacked Razdelnaya on horseback with the corps commander at the head: "We walked on the last reserves of physical strength and inexhaustible will. Tanks, self-propelled guns, motor vehicles moved where it seemed impossible to drive or pass. They were pulled, pushed, putting logs, boards, brushwood under the wheels and caterpillars - everything that was possible, up to padded jackets and overcoats. People are tired to the extreme, when control over themselves is threateningly lost, the sense of perception is dulled. A person becomes indifferent even to danger ... At the appointed time, the attacks continued to remain on their lines. They were unable to throw off the heavy fetters of extreme physical fatigue... And in a moment one swept through the battle formations - the final point of the order: "Tell everyone: the commander personally leads the attack!..." Never before have I had such a wide and emphatically notify the troops that I am leading them on the attack myself. In cases where this was caused by the extreme necessity of the battle, everything worked out in the course of events somehow by itself. But now an ominous alternative arose in all its height: either an immediate powerful night attack and a big victory, or a protracted battle at dawn and huge losses. Soaking wet and extremely tired people, if they are stopped now for at least one or two hours, will fall to the ground and fall asleep, and therefore freeze."

For two days, the cavalry-mechanized group fought off counterattacks and held out until the approach of the rifle troops of the 37th Army, which consolidated the success achieved.

With the entry of Soviet troops to this line, the enemy's front of defense on the Southern Bug was split. The 30th and 52nd army corps of the 6th German army, under the blows of the 37th and 57th armies and the 23rd tank corps, were thrown back to Tiraspol. The 29th, 44th and 72nd corps of the 6th Army and the 3rd Romanian Army Corps were surrounded by front troops from the north and northwest and pressed against Odessa. For this grouping, the threat of encirclement was brewing. It became especially acute when the troops of the cavalry-mechanized group, breaking away from the battle formations of the rifle troops, reached Strasbourg on April 5, where the 30th cavalry division of Major General V.S. Golovsky.

The German command understood the danger created for the grouping of its troops in the Odessa area. On the afternoon of April 5 and on the night of April 6, five divisions of the 29th Army Corps began to hastily gather in the area southeast of Razdelnaya. Two divisions of the 30th

corps. Both of these groups were supposed to strike towards each other in the direction of Razdelnaya and unite.

On the morning of April 6, the Germans, with the forces of the 29th Army Corps, struck from the area southeast of Razdelnaya, which hit the troops of the 82nd Rifle Corps of the 37th Army. The enemy managed to push back parts of the corps, reach the crossings across the Kuchurugan River and unite with their troops operating northwest of Razdelnaya. In continuous battles in the second half of April 7, Sharokhin's troops managed to split the enemy grouping that had broken through into two parts. The divisions of the 29th Army Corps managed to link up with their troops retreating to Tiraspol, and the troops of the 44th Army Corps were again pushed back to the south and southeast of Razdelnaya.

Meanwhile, the troops of the center and the left wing of the front were getting closer and closer to Odessa, which was defended by the 72nd Special Purpose Corps and part of the forces of the 44th Army Corps. In total, about six enemy divisions and a large number of individual units operated in the Odessa region. When organizing the defense, the enemy used Soviet structures left over from the autumn of 1941. Numerous beams, ravines filled with water, and estuaries greatly hampered the actions of our troops.

By the evening of April 9, enemy troops in the Odessa region found themselves in conditions of almost complete encirclement.

The horse-mechanized group, having captured Belyaevka and Mayaki on April 7, continued to wage heavy battles in this area, repulsing the blows of enemy troops withdrawing from Odessa. 10th Guards Cavalry Division under the command of Colonel S.A. Shevchuk was occupied by Ovidiopol, but soon, under the pressure of large masses of German-Romanian troops rushing to the Dniester, it was dismembered into parts isolated from each other and thrown back to the north.

The 8th Guards and 6th Armies bypassed Odessa from the northwest, and the 5th Shock Army advanced on the city along the coast. Only in the area of Ovidiopol there was an escape route with a subsequent crossing through the Dniester estuary. The main part of the rear, and then the combat troops of the Odessa enemy grouping, rushed here. Large groups tried to break through to the crossings in the Belyaevka area.

On the evening of April 9, units of the 5th shock army under the command of General V.D. Tsvetaeva immediately broke into the northern quarters of Odessa. At night, troops of the 8th Guards and 6th Armies and KMG approached the city. The attack on Odessa by the Cossacks with unfolded banners, according to Pliev, "represented a grandiose spectacle":

"The cavalry divisions, having rebuilt during the battle in one echelon and having put forward all the tanks, self-propelled guns, artillery, machine-gun carts, all headquarters and even medical squadrons into battle formations - in a word, everything, literally everything, rushed forward in horseback formation ... Huge an avalanche of Kuban people crossed the railway and rushed to the forest plantation.

And losses are "not the main thing, they are borne by everyone who fights."

In general, Pliev talks a lot about the strategy and tactics of modern warfare and about the correct use of cavalry masses in it. However, describing the capture of Odessa, this strategist demonstrates in one phrase that even twenty years later the level of his knowledge has not risen above the device of a horse. In every possible way extolling the power of a saber strike, the general casually recalls that Sherman tanks were in service in his corps, adding with disdain to bourgeois technology: "These English tanks were called the "Common Grave of Four", before that they were unreliable.

Firstly, Pliev considers the American A4 tank "English" Sherman ", he

never figured out what technique his fighters fought on. Meanwhile, the Sherman was one of the best medium tanks of the Second World War, in terms of armament (76 mm cannon, two forward and one anti-aircraft machine gun) and armor (75-100 mm) not inferior to the Soviet "thirty-four". As for reliability, the test report at the GVTU test site of the Red Army characterizes it as a reliable combat vehicle that is easy to maintain and operate. By the way, the crew consisted of five people.

Secondly, rarely did any of our generals miss the opportunity to kick the allies about their help: the equipment was given little, and even that was "unreliable". The fact that the Anglo-Americans delivered tanks alone in quantities sufficient to equip 50 tank corps is, of course, a trifle by Russian standards. Zhukov ate these buildings for breakfast.

But there were still more than 400 thousand unsurpassed vehicles that carried guns and gave mobility and maneuverability to the Soviet infantry. Without these Dodges, Studebakers, and Willis, Stalin's strikes were basically impossible, especially the spring offensive.

Soviet aircraft, mostly made of American aluminum, flew on American gasoline. Military trains pulled American steam locomotives along American rails, preventing the paralysis of railway transport in the Soviet Union.

Marshal Zhukov honestly admitted in a private conversation: "It cannot be denied that the Americans gave us so many materials, without which we could not form our reserves, we could not continue the war ... We did not have explosives, gunpowder. There was no way to equip rifle cartridges. The Americans really helped us out with gunpowder and explosives. And how much they drove us sheet steel! How could we quickly start producing tanks if it weren't for American help with steel?" Pliev would frighten the enemy with a true checker.

The list of materials strategically important for survival and Victory delivered to the Soviet Union will take at least two sheets. It will include wagons and locators, battleships and minesweepers, flour and sugar, cable and armor, aircraft and tires, armored personnel carriers and anti-aircraft guns, tarpaulin and motorcycles, shells and rubber, army cloth and medical supplies, and 5.5 million pairs of shoes...

Stalin, Khrushchev, Zhukov, all the leaders and commanders knew that without Western supplies, the Soviet Union could not have won the Patriotic War, being unable to produce enough weapons and military equipment and provide it with fuel and ammunition. But this truth was for a narrow circle, and for decades it was hammered into the "electorate" that "we had all this in abundance."

And now General Pliev sits in an American jeep, shoots with American gunpowder, talks on an American telephone, wears boots made of American leather, eats American stew, drinking Canadian juice, and, arrogantly protruding his lip, talks about the shortcomings of the "English" Sherman: there were too many unreliable, well, just a "mass grave". Instead of saying words of gratitude or even keeping silent.

Odessa was completely liberated by Soviet troops on April 10.

As a result of the operation, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, in cooperation with the 2nd Ukrainian Front, inflicted a heavy defeat on the 6th German and 3rd Romanian armies. Having advanced 180 km, Soviet troops liberated the Nikolaev and Odessa regions and a significant part of Northern Moldavia. Conditions were created for the complete liberation of Moldova, advancement deep into Romania and the Balkans.

After capturing Odessa, the 6th and 5th shock armies were withdrawn to the second echelon of the front, and the rest of the armies continued to develop the offensive to the west.

During April 11, the 57th Army with the 23rd Tank Corps attached to it advanced up to 20 km to the west and on April 12 reached the eastern bank of the Dniester northwest of Tiraspol and, having crossed the river on the move, captured the bridgeheads. Moreover, the tank corps, barely breaking away from the infantry, was surrounded in the Ploskoye area and fought there until the infantry units approached.

On the night of April 12, Sharokhin's army, using the forces of the 57th Rifle Corps, cleared Tiraspol of the enemy, and with four divisions reached the right bank of the Dniester south of the city. To its left, units of the 46th Army crossed the river. 8th Guards Army

To

On April 14, she completely cleared the coast of the Dniester estuary and on the night of April 15 crossed the Dniester near Ilyichevka.

In the following days, the troops of the front "through force" continued to build up forces in the captured bridgeheads. More and more affected overwork and losses. Nevertheless, the Headquarters insisted on continuing the offensive until the last soldier capable of attacking and knocking down the barriers of the 6th Army along the Dniester.

"It is rare for any of the front-line soldiers to hear the phrase: "The troops are tired!" - describes the state of the 37th Army, General A.K. Blazhey. - The fatigue of the troops is not only the physical fatigue of the people. In this case, we are talking about a sharp decrease in the offensive capabilities of the entire military body - an excellent composition of the advanced to headquarters and rear. It was in this state that many parts of the army were after crossing the Dniester and seizing bridgeheads on its right bank. The combat readiness of the troops, as it were, came into conflict with the offensive impulse of the personnel. The lack of people became more and more acute. Ammunition was still brought in with great interruptions. Artillery batteries had 0.1-0.3 combat sets of shells. Infantry during attacks did not always receive sufficient artillery, tank and air support. And yet there was no lull. Fighting continued along the entire front. Moreover, in a number of cases they were carried out with even greater tension and bitterness than before.

The advance of the troops of the front was stopped by the organized defense of the enemy, who occupied prepared lines at command heights, equipped with a network of Soviet-built pillboxes, covered by an anti-tank ditch and a three-kilometer swampy floodplain of the river. The Soviet divisions had to overcome all this practically without artillery and air support: their planes could not reach, ammunition had to be brought hundreds of kilometers away. As a result, the troops stomped on the spot and suffered losses. To the demands of the unit commanders to speed up the supply of ammunition, the headquarters had only one answer: save shells and mines and attack.

The front, choking on blood, tried to fulfill the main task set by Stalin - to reach the state border. On the night of April 17, Malinovsky's headquarters sent a new directive to the army commanders: "... prepare and conduct an offensive operation ... defeat the enemy grouping in the southern part of Bessarabia between the Dniester and the Prut ... Go to the state border ..."

The front command attached great importance to the forthcoming operation. Trem

armies were given numerous means of reinforcement. Thus, Sharokhin's army received the 9th breakthrough artillery division, two Katyusha regiments, an anti-tank brigade, an anti-tank artillery regiment, a regiment of self-propelled guns, an engineering

sapper units! There was, however, one nuance: all of them were not provided with shells. On the first day of the offensive, including breaking through the enemy's defenses, it was allowed to use up about half of the ammunition load, with the usual consumption in such cases of at least four to five. This meant that normal artillery preparation was out of the question.

Exactly at two o'clock on April 25, simultaneously with a short artillery cannonade, the rifle units of the 57th, 37th and 6th armies went on the attack. However, this time, too, the matter ended with only insignificant progress in certain sectors. In fact, the first day did not bring any results.

Late in the evening, summing up, Malinovsky pointed out: "The offensive on April 25 developed unsatisfactorily. It is necessary to demand from the troops and to show themselves unshakable stamina and assertiveness in repulsing enemy counterattacks. In no case should the offensive be stopped ... "

But the next day, the results of the hastily prepared operation turned out to be the same. Soviet attacks choked one after another. The Germans, securely covered by their bomber and attack aircraft, often launched counterattacks. On the bridgeheads, such a situation developed that it was already difficult to determine which side was advancing and which was defending.

"The army commander and I visited the observation posts of the corps and divisions almost daily, personally followed the course of the battles," writes the former chief of staff-37. - The conclusion suggested itself - it's time to stop the unsuccessful attacks!

For a person, no matter how hardy and hardened he may be, there is a limit of physical and mental stress, overstepping which he falls into a state of prostration or trance, loses the ability to respond to external stimuli. This applies not only to individuals, but, as battle experience has shown, entire subunits and even units often found themselves in a similar state. Many participants in the Great Patriotic War, especially the commanders of rifle units and subunits, undoubtedly had to witness such seemingly unexpected phenomena: artillery preparation ends, the fire shaft moves into the depths of the enemy's defenses, tanks go on the attack, and the infantry continues to lie in the trenches. The commander is nervous, swears, threatens, but to no avail ... Nobody

And

nothing is able to lift people from the earth until they restore the minimum supply of necessary energy. Since their physical and nervous tension has crossed the highest line, they need at least a short respite. Unfortunately, some commanders, not sufficiently familiar with the elementary laws of human psychology and physiology, neglected such factors or simply did not pay attention to them. And this sometimes led to unjustified losses.

The troops, like air, needed a breather. This was well understood by the commander of the army, and the commanders of corps, divisions, regiments. They knew about it in the headquarters of the front. However, there was no order to stop the attacks." I think that our generals gained all these psychological delights after the war with the help of their literary "blacks" and editors.

In any case, "understanding everything perfectly", the front headquarters daily confirmed one order - to break through the enemy defenses.

Only on May 6, having made sure that Malinovsky had conscientiously used up all his strength, did the Stavka issue a directive on the transition to defense.

## CRIMEAN OPERATION

The withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Odessa region put the enemy grouping in the Crimea in an even more hopeless position, which contributed to its defeat by the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front and the Separate Primorskaya Army.

The liberation of the Crimea, envisaged according to the original plan simultaneously with the offensive in Ukraine, actually began only at its final stage and resulted in an independent strategic operation.

The peculiarities of the geographical position of the Crimean peninsula made it the most important strategic position on the Black Sea. This explains the fierce nature of the struggle for it throughout almost the entire war. Hitler tried to the last to keep the Crimea for both economic and political reasons. Its loss would mean a sharp drop in the prestige of the Reich in the countries of South-Eastern Europe and in Turkey. Crimea covered the Balkan strategic front of Germany and important sea communications going through the Black Sea straits to the ports of the western coast and up the Danube. Fearing for the safety of the Romanian coast, Marshal Antonescu categorically objected to the abandonment of the peninsula.

As you know, in May 1942, Manstein's 11th Army utterly defeated the Crimean Front of General Kozlov, destroying three Soviet armies on the Kerch Peninsula. A month later, the Germans stormed Sevastopol, capturing about 95,000 soldiers and commanders. As a result, the strategic situation for the Soviet troops in the south deteriorated sharply. The Black Sea Fleet, providing for the actions of the ground forces, suffered heavy losses and lost all of its equipped bases. Crimea also served as a springboard for the invasion of the territory of the Soviet Caucasus.

By the autumn of 1943, the situation had changed radically in favor of the Red Army. In early October, Tolbukhin's Southern Front stormed the Eastern Wall on the Molochnaya River, which covered the approaches to the Crimea from the north, and Colonel General I.E. Petrov cleared the Taman Peninsula from the enemy and again went to the Kerch Strait.

In the Operational Directorate of the General Staff, they again got maps of Crimea. When discussing various options for further actions, some of the operators made a proposal not to take Crimea yet, but to isolate the enemy there and release most of the released troops of the two fronts for operations in other directions. The peninsula, with narrow approaches to which it was easy to close, was not a base from which to strike, and the forces of the 17th Army - three German and seven Romanian divisions - were insufficient and unsuitable for conducting such offensive operations.

However, this would be a non-Soviet approach, because there are no fortresses that the Bolsheviks could not take. Therefore, the point of view of the "isolationists" was rejected in principle: only an assault. The question should have been considered in a single plane: "how to take the peninsula."

On September 22, at the request of the Headquarters, Marshal Vasilevsky sent his thoughts on this matter. His plan was that the troops of the Southern Front, while bypassing Melitopol from the south, would quickly capture Sivash, Perekop, Dzhankoy and break into the Crimea on the shoulders of the enemy. To do this, it was proposed to strengthen Tolbukhin's armies at the expense of the North Caucasian Front. In addition, air and sea landings were to be landed in the Dzhankoy area in order to reach the rear of the enemy defending Sivash and strike in a northerly direction, towards the troops of the Southern Front.

However, regrouping an entire front is a troublesome business. Instead of massaging



forces in one direction, a decision was made simultaneously with a breakthrough

Perekop positions to force the Kerch Strait.

On October 12, General Petrov, having received the appropriate directive from the Headquarters, ordered the troops of the front to conduct a landing operation together with the Black Sea Fleet and the Azov military flotilla in order to capture the Kerch Peninsula. At first, Petrov intended to carry out the landing of two armies on a broad front, not only in Kerch, but also in the region of Yalta, Alushta, or directly in Sevastopol, in order to force the enemy to disperse his troops. However, this proved impossible due to the deplorable state of the fleet.

Already the experience of the Kerch-Feodosiya operation in 1941 showed that our naval strategists were too tough for operations of such complexity. Then, under the conditions of absolute Soviet dominance at sea and in the air, almost half of the landing force and many watercraft died, and almost all warships involved in the operation were damaged. The German author K. Yuon, assessing that landing in the Crimea from the point of view of the "opposite camp", writes: "The fleet did not have any more or less suitable landing equipment, air defense was too weak. Dominance at sea was ineffectual due to the lack of at least temporary air supremacy. An amphibious landing in winter without air cover, without a meteorological service, without anti-tank weapons led to heavy losses. Once again, the Soviet command showed complete indifference to human lives, confining itself to pompous praise of heroism.

In the autumn of 1943, there were even fewer opportunities for a major landing operation. There were no transports and landing craft of special construction. During the two years of the war, the Black Sea Fleet suffered heavy irreplaceable losses: 1 cruiser, 3 leaders, 11 destroyers, 28 submarines, dozens of boats, hundreds of auxiliary vessels and armed steamers. Literally the day before, on October 5, three strategists - Kuznetsov, Petrov and Vladimirov - sent a detachment consisting of the leader "Kharkov", the destroyers "Merciless" and "Able" to raid Yalta. Having practiced shooting along the coast, as a result of which several residents of the city and not a single enemy soldier were killed, the ships lay down on the return course in the morning. On October 6, while retreating, they were overtaken and destroyed by German dive bombers.

From such nonsense, Stalin was furious. The Supreme Commander ordered all the large warships of the Black Sea Fleet to be put away from harm's way into the Stavka reserve.

The Azov military flotilla in August 1942 alone lost 107 boats and armed ships during a breakthrough to Novorossiysk, 14 ships were blown up in bases. The Germans, in turn, leaving the Taman Peninsula, destroyed or took to the Crimea everything that could float on the water. The fleet was rebuilt.

Thus, there was practically nothing to force the Kerch Strait, there was nothing to stutter about fire support from warships, and most of the field artillery did not reach the Crimean coast. In addition, the season of autumn storms was approaching.

But the task was set, Petrov and Marshal Timoshenko, who was in charge of the front, had to carry it out. Two weeks were allotted for preparation. The final plan of the operation was to land large forces north and south of Kerch. After seizing the bridgeheads, the troops were to take the ports of Kerch and Kamysh-Burun with attacks in converging directions, further develop the offensive to the west and, in cooperation with the troops of the Southern Front, liberate the Crimea.

This decision provided for the creation of two detachments. The first detachment was formed by the Azov Flotilla and the troops of the 56th Army, Lieutenant General K.S. Melnik, who

they were supposed to invade the northeastern part of the Kerch Peninsula and take possession of Kerch. The detachment was commanded by the commander of the Azov Flotilla, Rear Admiral S. G. Gorshkov. The second detachment included the ships of the Black Sea Fleet, concentrated in Novorossiysk, and the troops of the 18th Army

Lieutenant General K.N. Leselidze. They were supposed to land in the eastern part of the peninsula near the fishing village of Eltigen. This group was commanded by the commander of the Novorossiysk Naval Base, Rear Admiral G.N. Bachelors.

On the flanks of the main landings, two demonstrative landings were planned: in the area of Cape Tarkhan, on the northeast coast of the Kerch Peninsula, and in the area of Mount Opuk, southwest of Eltigen.

To ensure the landing, 16 detachments were created, the basis of which were basic and river minesweepers, fishing seiners, motorized boats, as well as rowboats and rafts from empty iron barrels. The diversity in the types of landing craft, their different capacity, speed and seaworthiness complicated the organization, the Tyulkin fleet required appropriate additional equipment to ensure the fastest loading and unloading of manpower and equipment. From armored boats and sea hunters, two cover detachments and two artillery support detachments were formed. In total, 119 boats of various classes and 159 auxiliary vessels were involved, including home-made

"pontoons".

On the Chushka Spit and the western tip of the Taman Peninsula, 667 guns with a caliber from 203 to 76 mm and 90 RS installations were concentrated. The total number of Soviet troops was 150,000.

Air cover was to be provided by over 1,000 aircraft of the 4th Air Army and Fleet Aviation.

Despite the obvious material insecurity, an optimistic mood reigned among the troops. The opinion prevailed that the 17th Army, which had suffered losses in the Kuban and during the evacuation from Taman, and was also threatened with a complete blockade, would not stubbornly hold on to the Crimea, and it would not be too difficult to land on the Kerch Peninsula. There were even "data not yet verified" that the Germans had allegedly already begun to withdraw.

The overall management of the operation was entrusted to the commander of the North Caucasian Front, General Petrov, and his assistant for the marine part, the commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Vice Admiral L.A. Vladimirov. Landed troops remained subordinate to their commanders, who directed their actions both during the preparation period and after the landing.

The operation was planned to begin on the night of October 28 simultaneously in both directions, but due to a storm that broke out, it had to be postponed for three days.

On the Kerch Peninsula, units of the 98th German Infantry, 6th Romanian Cavalry and 3rd Romanian Mountain Rifle Divisions with reinforcement units defended on a wide front, in total about 60,000 soldiers and officers. 175 field and anti-tank artillery guns, 11 mortar and 23 anti-aircraft batteries were deployed on the coast. The Kerch Strait and approaches to it were mined. In the ports of Kerch, Feodosia, Kamysh-Burun, a ship group was concentrated, numbering 30 high-speed landing barges, 25 patrol and torpedo boats, 6 minesweepers and other armed vessels. Knowing the unique ability of Soviet generals to attack the same ones. rake, the German command simply could not wait for the landing of a large enemy landing on the coast of the Kerch Peninsula. Moreover, the mine situation in the southern part of the strait

made it possible to predict with high probability that a landing was most likely in the northern part of the coast.

On the evening of October 31, in Temryuk and Taman, the landing of troops on ships and vessels began. In the Kerch direction, two divisions of the 1 | 1 | th Guards Rifle Corps of General V.F. were to land as the first echelon of the landing. Sergatsky. The 369th separate battalion went with them as an assault detachment.

marines. A day later, another infantry division was planned to land as a second echelon. Following the 11th Guards, the 16th Rifle Corps under the command of General K.I. Provalova. The 318th Novorossiysk and 117th Guards Rifle Divisions, the 255th Marine Brigade and the 386th Marine Battalion landed in the Eltigen area in the first echelon. They were to be followed by the rest of the 20th Rifle Corps.

The landing units were supposed to be at the start by 24 hours. However, the weather failed the weather forecasters again: the wind intensified, a storm began on Azov and in the strait. All this affected the observance of the schedule, shifting all stages of the operation by one and a half to two hours. Artillery firing positions on the Chushka Spit were almost completely in the water. Admiral Gorshkov proposed to postpone the operation, but the commander of the Black Sea Fleet did not support him. At the request of Petrov, Admiral Vladimirovsky authoritatively stated: "There will be no storm. And if the strait makes noise, it will lull the enemy's vigilance.

When the detachments of the Azov flotilla went to the open sea, the storm reached a strength of six points. A bunch of 150 poorly seaworthy and completely unseaworthy, overloaded with people, ammunition and equipment of watercraft, simply physically could not, in such conditions, and even at night, overcome 20 miles from Temryuk to the Crimean coast. Some of them immediately drowned or were thrown ashore. Therefore, the front commander was forced to give an order to Gorshkov and commander Melnik to return the landing forces to their original position.

On Taman the situation developed similarly. Ships to the landing sites of the troops of the 18th Army arrived extremely slowly, some did not come at all. It was necessary to increase the load on the ships that arrived, to leave part of the artillery on the shore. The landing force entered the open sea only at 3 o'clock in the morning on November 1.

"Already here, at the start, the orderly system of battle formations was disrupted," recalls the former commander of the 318th Infantry Division, General G.F. Gladkov. — The weather was getting worse. Waves tossed ships from side to side. The boats hardly towed the rafts with materiel. The forward detachments, marching on flat-bottomed motorboats, mixed up with each other. From the advanced flagship, we anxiously watched this sad picture ... "

Nevertheless, the ships kept heading for the Crimea. Despite the fact that the "strait was noisy", this did not lull the enemy's vigilance. Landing parties were found three kilometers from the coast. At 0430 hours, on a signal from the forward detachment ships, strong artillery preparation was carried out from Taman. 51 heavy guns of the mobile divisions of the Poti and Tuapse bases and 140 army guns hit the four-kilometer landing front, and then moved the fire further, 500 meters from the water's edge. However, blind shooting from one side of the strait to the other could not suppress the enemy's fire system:

"Again, several searchlights illuminated the landing. Their rays lingered on the ships, as if counting our strength. Then hundreds of flares appeared in the sky, and the enemy began shelling. Shells were exploding everywhere. Every now and then gray columns of water rose up around the flagship.

The water roared as it crashed onto the deck. Black smoke billowed from some of the boats. Impenetrable darkness was constantly replaced by a bright, revealing light. In those moments when the brave female pilots of the Taman regiment sent their planes to the enemy's searchlight installations, the light was turned off. The plane was leaving, and again the projectors stretched out their devilish tentacles to the landing party. Here we suffered the first losses. Several small ships sank.

There were three explosions to the left of the flagship. We saw how the boat, blown up by mines, fell apart. On it was the headquarters of the 31st regiment, headed by Colonel Shiryaev ... Another boat caught fire on the right. The sailors could be seen putting out the flames.

"Chop the tugboat!" a voice shouted desperately. The chopped end lashed out at the wave. A raft with twelve anti-tank guns stood on end and disappeared into the darkness.

So, at about 5 o'clock, the landing of the first throw of units of the 18th Army began in the area of \u200b\u200bEltigen and the commune "Initiative". Strong surf flooded small craft and boats. From deep-seated boats that could not approach the beach, the fighters got to the shore by swimming and, with a "half-burst" through the minefields, went on the attack. The flat-bottomed craft were thrown out by the assault troops, but none of them returned: "It was the most tragic mistake in terms of the landing operation. The calculation was on flat-bottomed ships: having delivered the forward detachments, they had to return and, plying between ships, barges and the coast, land the entire landing force in several steps. But most of the flat-bottomed ships immediately broke down. Some died from fire, a few were blown up by mines. We took into account and foresaw these inevitable losses. We did not take into account the strength of the storm: the main part of the watercraft was thrown ashore by the storm and smashed against the rocks. Landing was no longer

on what".

At that moment, the sailors received an order to return to the base: "The ships turned around and left. They left the Crimean coast. And there, near the very water, someone's figure loomed, shaking his hands over his head.

In total, during the night they managed to land a little more than two thousand people, mainly from the 318th Infantry Division and a separate naval brigade, eighteen 45-mm guns and fifteen mortars. There was not a single headquarters group and not a single regiment commander on the Crimean coast. Separate units, having no general leadership, acted independently. Of the 121 units of various boats and landing craft that took part in the transfer of troops, 37 units were lost and 29 were out of order, having received various damages.

By dawn, the paratroopers managed to capture a bridgehead in the Eltigen area up to 5 km along the front and up to 2 km in depth. In the afternoon, Colonel Gladkov with the command of the 318th division broke into the village on a single motorboat.

The Germans tried to drop the landing into the sea as soon as possible, but he was hooked firmly. Heavy artillery fire from the Taman Peninsula and air support played a big role in holding the bridgehead. During November 1-3, Soviet attack aircraft helped repel 37 enemy attacks, in groups of 8-10 aircraft. "Ily" almost continuously hung over the battlefield. During November 1 alone, the attack aircraft of the fleet made about 600 sorties to support the landing units. Ammunition and food were delivered by air.

The best support for the Eltigenians would be the speedy landing of second-echelon troops, in particular the 117th Guards Rifle Division. But due to heavy losses in the ship's composition, Admiral Kholostyakov, having only 46 small-tonnage ships and 6 armored boats, on the night of November 2, was able to send only one rifle regiment and some light artillery from Taman in two flights, a total of 3270 people. Reinforcements on

the bridgehead was landed, but at the same time another 30 units of watercraft were lost - after all, now there was no question of surprise. German artillery, torpedo boats and fast barges provided active resistance. For each voyage to the Crimean coast, which developed into a naval battle, one had to pay a heavy price. Attempts to organize transport during the daytime failed.

The landing north of Kerch was again postponed, the weather still did not allow the ships of the Azov flotilla to go to sea.

By November 4, the fleet had landed 9,220 men with 35 guns at Eltigen. These troops needed regular supplies and were completely dependent on him. The fleet had nothing left to transport the rest of Leselidze's army across the strait.

According to Gladkov, on land he was attacked by the entire 98th German Infantry Division, accompanied by a completely outrageous - at least 60 - number

tanks and self-propelled guns, all, as usual, "tigers" and "Ferdinands": "The Germans launched "wave attacks" in the afternoon: there was one line of tanks and infantry, followed by another at a distance of 300-400 meters, a third .. The first "waves" broke. Burning tanks were sticking out in front of the trenches, enemy corpses were lying around ... In three days, paratroopers, artillerymen and aviators destroyed more than 30 combat vehicles.

This is especially impressive, given the fact that the commander of the 17th Army had only the 259th division of 75-mm assault guns in the entire Crimea, located in the Dzhankoy area. True, Marshal Eremenko mentions the presence of two Romanian tank companies on the Kerch Peninsula, but even this gives a figure of just over 40 combat vehicles.

By this time, the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front, having overcome the fortifications of the Turkish Wall, broke into the Perekop Isthmus and started fighting for Armyansk. The enemy grouping located in the Crimea was blocked from land and cut off from the main forces of the Wehrmacht. From November 1 to November 6, the 10th Rifle Corps of the 51st Army "according to the Frunze method" (Marshal Koshevoy says that even the guide was found the same one who showed the way to the red regiments in 1920, and, despite the age of seventy, the old man again did not let us down), chest-deep in icy water, with ammunition on his shoulders crossed the Sivash and captured a bridgehead on its southern coast. However, it was not possible to move further into the depths of the Crimea.

It was a "call" to Petrov - it's time to attack. Taking advantage of the fact that the enemy concentrated the main forces to fight the landing of the 18th army, on the night of November 3, the Azov flotilla successfully landed two divisions of the 11th rifle corps northeast of Kerch. By November 8, five rifle divisions, a naval brigade and two separate battalions of marines had concentrated on the bridgehead. On November 11, the offensive of the troops of the North Caucasian Front began on the bridgehead near Kerch.

The Kerch-Eltigen landing operation ended there, Soviet losses in 11 days amounted to 27,397 people killed, drowned and wounded. Of the 16 armored boats that provided the landing, the storm and the enemy destroyed 9. None of the goals was achieved.

By mid-November, units of the 56th Army, having advanced 10-12 km, cleared the northeastern ledge of the Kerch Peninsula from the enemy and reached the village of Bulganak and the eastern outskirts of Kerch. However, here "our troops were stopped by superior enemy forces" - carried by the same 98th Infantry Division of General Reinhardt, and went on the defensive. The bridgehead captured by the Primorsky Army was seen through and through by the enemy, it was small and inconvenient, that is, it did not have sufficient operational capacity for the accumulation of large forces.

"It turned out some kind of vicious circle," explains the reasons for the failure, Colonel General K.I. Failures. - In order to break the enemy, more forces and means were required. And at the same time, the transfer of, say, the 227th Rifle Division to the Kerch Peninsula already hinders, and often simply does not allow units and subunits to maneuver. It is also important that the presence of dominant heights in the defense of the Nazis, including Mount Mithridates, almost ruled out the secrecy of our preparation for hostilities. From Mithridates, from other no less convenient heights, where the firing positions of the fascist batteries were located, the enemy, having excellent visibility, conducted continuous artillery fire on the combat formations of our units located on the bridgehead, inflicting tangible losses on our personnel.

The offensive of Kreizer's 51st Army through Perekop and Sivash also bogged down. Having broken through on the move through the Turkish Wall, in some places not yet occupied by the enemy, the advanced units of the 4th Guards Kuban Cavalry and 19th Tank Corps got involved in battles for the powerful resistance center of Armyansk. The pulling up and deployment of the main forces were carried out cautiously and not energetically enough,

surprise was lost. The Germans blocked the Soviet units in the area of Armyansk with counterattacks and inflicted serious losses on them. Their remnants barely made their way through the Turkish shaft.

The build-up of forces and the supply of troops on the Sivash bridgehead was fraught with great difficulties. "Reconnaissance of the crossing area," recalls the former commander of the 63rd Rifle Corps, Marshal P.K. Koshevoy, - showed that the transfer of corps troops to the Crimean bridgehead could take place only in an exceptional case. Those who crossed the bay in shallow water, as a rule, soon fell ill. Cold water and mud saturated with salt corroded the body. People were swollen. It was almost impossible to fight colds and inflammation of the joints in those conditions. It was necessary to focus on engineering crossings.

And they still had to be created. The 51st Army had a difficult "wintering" ahead.

The first attempt to liberate Crimea failed.

Since the 18th Army, due to the lack of watercraft, could not be landed on the bridgehead near Eltigen, it was withdrawn from the North Caucasian Front by decision of the Headquarters and sent to Ukraine. With the army, the artillery also left, which supported the Eltigens with fire. Aviation also has other concerns. The landing force in Eltigen, which had lost more than half of its composition, was tightly blocked by the enemy from the sea and from the air, was listed as a distraction and "written off" as having completed its task. The command of the front and fleet could not organize its evacuation or help with manpower and equipment, and did not intend to. It was already planning new diversionary assaults. The official history of the 18th Army states that starting on November 9, "the build-up of forces and the delivery of supplies to the bridgehead virtually ceased."

To raise the morale of the suicide bombers, on November 18, congratulations were conveyed to Colonel Gladkov on the fact that 34 fighters and the commander of his group were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. "Congratulations to the Red Troopers on their awards! Soon they will come out sideways to you," shouted the German radio. Only the will of the divisional commander, the high professionalism of the personnel who passed the Malaya Zemlya, and the girls from the regiment of night bombers, Major E.D., saved the paratroopers from the complete destruction. Bershadskaya, who dropped sacks of ammunition and food on the bridgehead at night.

On November 20, the North Caucasian Front was liquidated as unnecessary. On the basis of the front administration and the 56th Army, a Separate Primorsky Army was created.

On December 4, General Petrov made another attempt. The plan was to, having pinned down the enemy units defending in Kerch and on the heights along the coast of the Sea of Azov, with the main forces of the army to break through the German defenses in its center northeast of the city, and then with converging strikes of the 16th and 11th corps from east and northwest to take possession of Kerch.

At 8.30, after a 60-minute artillery preparation, the troops of the Separate Primorsky Army went on the attack. However, due to unsatisfactory reconnaissance, the artillery preparation did not reach the goal, the enemy's fire system turned out to be unsuppressed. The Soviet infantry and tanks, having run into well-organized fire, were unable to capture the front line and rolled back. In the following days, everything was repeated according to the same scenario and with the same result: there was no success in any of the sections. Replenishments arriving on the peninsula immediately rushed into battle without any preparation and suffered heavy losses.

Moreover, while repulsing the Soviet offensive north of Kerch, the Germans simultaneously launched a decisive assault on Eltigen. Gladkov's group, which had been operating in isolation from the main forces for more than a month, found itself in a critical situation: ammunition, food, and medicines were almost completely used up; for three thousand

soldiers and commanders accounted for more than a thousand wounded. There were no forces to hold the bridgehead; the lack of help from the command, the senselessness and doom of further "sitting" had a depressing effect on the personnel, there were cases of desertion. Unable to evacuate the paratroopers due to the incapacity of the Black Sea Fleet, Petrov ordered Gladkov to independently break through to Kerch to connect with the Primorsky Army, since the army itself was also unable to break through to the landing force.

On the night of December 7, leaving the seriously wounded and up to a hundred fighters as a rearguard, Gladkov's detachment of about 1,500 people forded the Churbash Lake and, having secretly made a 20-kilometer march behind enemy lines, went to Kerch. At 7 o'clock in the morning, with a sudden attack, acting mainly with cold weapons, the paratroopers captured the enemy's key position - Mount Mithridates, which so "interfered" with the corps of Sergatsky and Provalov, and the southern outskirts of the city with the Coal Quay. A group of fighters under the command of Major Grigoryan passed through the city, crossed the front line and entered the location of the Separate Primorsky Army. The Germans were so confused that the rest of the paratroopers could easily connect with their own, until noon no one even tried to counterattack them. But the mastery of such an important frontier almost without a fight was a phenomenal success, and Gladkov decided to stay on his new "bridgehead". Kerch was practically in their hands, one blow from the 16th Rifle Corps, whose positions were at a line of sight, would have decided the whole thing.

However, Petrov and his staff, who did not expect such agility from the already "buried" Gladkovites, were not ready to take advantage of the situation, and the troops of the Primorsky Army lost all their fighting ardor in poorly supported attacks of the previous days. At 14.00 (six hours passed after the establishment of radio contact), the perplexed division commander 318 sent a coded message to the commander:

"Why don't you go on the offensive? It's very difficult for us. The enemy is concentrating more and more subunits against us. Already from all sides closed the ring around the line we captured. We have little strength. Ammunition is running out. The wounded are concentrated at the pier. We need urgent help in men and ammunition. Throw a landing party at me. We will not surrender Mount Mithridates. This is such a line that will ensure victory over the enemy occupying Kerch ... "

December 7 turned out to be a day of missed opportunities. strikes despite

Petrov's assurances never came. Parts of the 16th Rifle Corps, which had the main task of capturing the city, showed little activity in the evening and calmed down on that. For a long time, only the paratroopers, who had accomplished the impossible for the third time, could not calm down.

"Assessing the situation that had arisen," recalls Gladkov, "we were all extremely surprised that the 16th Corps did not break through the defenses. "I watched the actions of the corps all the time," Ivakin said. — None

did not see the attack. Artillery preparation was weak. A small line of infantry and six tanks appeared. The infantry lay down, and the tanks went back.

- I don't understand! Bushin was indignant. - A whole army on the bridgehead, really it was impossible to allocate more forces for a breakthrough! After all, our Grigoryan with a detachment passed the front of the German defense. It was a signal for the corps ... "

(It should be noted that Grigoryan's group consisted of 18 people, General Provalov had four rifle divisions, two tank, three mortar, two artillery regiments).

The general conclusion of the "Gladkovites": "On December 7, Kerch could have been taken. The enemy's reserves in the city area acted against the landing. The Germans had nothing to reinforce the units occupying the defense in front of the 16th Corps. Prisoners captured by paratroopers in Kerch testified that they had a panic in the morning; no one knew that

done, no one controlled them.

The situation was not correctly taken into account by the army headquarters. The indecision of the commander and his staff gave the enemy a gain in time ... "

Admiral Kholostyakov agrees with this assessment: "Being a sailor, I am careful not to go into the analysis of land operations. And yet, it seems that the situation that had developed by the morning of December 7 could then be used to master the whole of Kerch. Of course, with immediate and very decisive actions by fairly large forces ... However, the troops concentrated near Kerch, obviously, were not ready to go on the offensive.

These six hours, which were lost by General Petrov, who was unable to quickly respond to changes in the situation, cost the army four months of marking time under the fire of German artillery and machine guns.

On the morning of December 8, the Soviet rifle corps still did not take any active action. To help Gladkov, ships with a battalion of the 83rd Naval Brigade (380 people), formed mainly from young replenishment, who went into battle for the first time, arrived at Coal Pier. Considering such support to be of little combat capability, the divisional commander left the battalion to defend the pier. After three days of fierce fighting, without waiting for the breakthrough of the army, the remnants of the landing force were driven out of Mount Mithridates and evacuated from the southern outskirts of Kerch. On the night of December 10, a detachment of 22 boats and motorized boats under fire took on board 1080 people. At the same time, two boats were sunk and eight were damaged. A day later, 360 people were taken from the shore and picked up from the water. By the way, the barrier that covered the evacuation again went to its own through the enemy's battle formations.

This ended the forty-day epic of the amphibious assault of the 18th Army.



To help Petrov, Stalin sent from Moscow the head of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff, General S.M. Shtemenko and the representative of the Headquarters, Marshal K.E. Voroshilov.

After the failure in the role of commander-in-chief of the North-Western direction and the organizer of the defense of Leningrad, Voroshilov managed to "work" as a representative of the Stavka on the Volkhov front. The result of his activities was GKO Resolution No. 356 of April 1, 1942, which, in particular, stated:

"In view of the request of Comrade Voroshilov, he was seconded in February to the Volkhov Front as a representative of the Headquarters to help the front command and stayed there for about a month. However, Comrade Voroshilov's stay on the Volkhov front did not give the desired results.

Wishing once again to give the opportunity to use their experience in front-line work, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (6) suggested Comrade Voroshilov to take direct command of the Volkhov Front. But Comrade Voroshilov reacted negatively to this proposal and did not want to take responsibility for the Volkhov Front, despite the fact that this front is now of decisive importance for the defense of Leningrad, referring to the fact that the Volkhov Front is a difficult front and does not want to fail on this deed.

In view of the foregoing, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of the Soviet Union (6) decides:

1. To admit that Comrade Voroshilov did not justify himself in the work entrusted to him at the front.

2. Send comrade Voroshilov to rear military work.

However, it was precisely in the rear work, where victory was forged, that knowledge and organizational talent were especially required. Where could an unemployed marshal who had one class of a rural school behind him apply his abilities? In aircraft manufacturing? Therefore, having led the partisan movement until November 1942, where he "personally instructed the commanders of the partisan detachments", the marshal again "represented"

A bet on different fronts, without the risk of "failing in this business."

Shtemenko's reminiscences of Voroshilov's activities in the Crimea are mostly anecdotal. First of all, on the way to the front, the marshal ("Our master was a great educator") gave Shtemenko an exam in opera art and literature: "Risking embarrassment in front of K.E. Voroshilov, I nevertheless told him all this without concealment. My interlocutor smiled sympathetically and only noticed that music always adorns life, makes a person better. The "exam" in literature was more successful." In the evenings: "Kliment Efremovich usually asked Kitaev to read aloud something from Chekhov or Gogol. The reading lasted an hour and a half. Kitaev read well (the most suitable occupation for a colonel in the war!),

and bliss was reflected on Voroshilov's face.

Arriving at the Kerch bridgehead, "the most prominent organizer of the Armed Forces," as was customary with our marshals, immediately went to the front line: "The restless Kliment Efremovich did not limit himself only to what he heard from the corps commanders and saw himself from their NP. He rushed into the trenches, to the front line, although, in truth, there was nothing for him to do there. It was not possible to dissuade him from this.

"I never bowed under bullets and was not afraid of the enemy," he retorted all our arguments. - And if anyone thinks that they can do without us, they can not go with me.

After that, try to stay at the NP or at the headquarters. Everyone, of course, went to

divisions and regiments of the first echelon.

Eagle, Kliment Efremovich! But is that the valor of a commander? He does not bow to bullets, he is not afraid of enemies, and it is weak to take responsibility. This department cannot be trusted.

Here the marshal is in charge of the Leningrad Front: he follows the tank along the ice of the Neva, in order to visually make sure that the ice of the tank will not withstand the weight. Convinced: the tank sank. The picture was observed with admiration by the border guard officer A.L. Kozlov: "The enemy is shelling the area, but Voroshilov, watching the battlefield, does not seem to notice the close gaps. A colonel standing nearby was killed. Even after that, the marshal did not consider it necessary to leave ... There were legends about Kliment Efremovich on Ladoga. It was said that back in 1941, as commander of the Leningrad Front, Voroshilov, in order to prevent the withdrawal of some of our infantry units in the direction of the main attack of the Germans, rushed with a group of officers to cut across the retreating ones and thereby restored the situation, prevented a breakthrough of the front.

Needless to say, he was a brave warrior. He came and closed the breakthrough "in the direction of the main blow" with his chest. It is only unclear who was in charge of the front while the "first marshal" was doing such interesting things?

Before Voroshilov, Petrov's actions were "coordinated" by Marshal Timoshenko, in much the same manner:

"- Cover yourself from this height with a smoke screen," the representative of the Stavka, Marshal of the Soviet Union S.K., immediately decided. Timoshenko, who arrived at my observation post and to whom I reported my thoughts. - Call the aircraft, they will put smokes, and you attack at this time. Well, now let's go, let's see how your army lives.

From the height of their positions, the enemy observed our communications quite well in some places and, of course, did not let a single vehicle through so as not to fire at it from guns or mortars ... We drove slowly, in several places the Germans fired at us from mortars, but neither Timoshenko nor his driver did not seem to notice this ... These few hours, while I was traveling with the marshal, were spent with great benefit.

And so the "Chinese observers" rode around the fronts, giving advice, demonstrating insane personal courage to the troops, and then - in the trailer, listening to Gogol at night in the professional performance of toadies-colonels (here Sokolovsky is sitting 100 km from the front with an adjutant colonel. Should definitely be

it is the colonel, this emphasizes your importance - it is clear that you are a big boss).

Having received reinforcements in the person of a "prominent commander of the Stalinist school", the commander of the Separate Primorsky Army began to develop a new plan. By this time, nine rifle divisions, two naval, one tank brigades, and heavy artillery had accumulated on the bridgehead.

The main role was still assigned to the troops of the 16th Rifle and 11th Guards Corps. This time they decided to deliver the main blow on the right flank of the bridgehead, bypassing the "impregnable" village of Bulganak from the north. To ensure the success of the breakthrough and the capture of command heights, which were difficult to storm head-on, on the initiative of Voroshilov, it was planned to land tactical amphibious assault forces on the Azov coast in the immediate rear of the German troops in the area of Cape Tarkhan. The operation plan was approved by the Stavka on December 22, and 10 days were allotted for preparation.

For the landing, the Azov people collected all serviceable means - about 40 tenders, motorboats, fishing seiners, several guards and armored boats. The main landing force consisted of the 166th Guards Rifle Regiment, the 143rd Marine Battalion and a reconnaissance company under the overall command of Lieutenant Colonel G.K. Glavatsky with a total number of about 3,000 fighters and commanders. The number of auxiliary troops of Major N.D. Alekseenko did not exceed 700 people. Responsibility for preparing landings, boarding ships and ensuring passage by sea was assigned to Admiral Kholostyakov, who took temporary command of the Azov Flotilla. The landing was repeatedly postponed either because of the unavailability of the ground forces, or because of bad weather.

As Kholostyakov recalls: "It was just right to cancel it on the night of January 10: the day before, an impenetrable fog hung over the sea, and now a storm threatened to break out. However, a new delay was considered impossible, the order was categorical, and the landing  
gone."

The landing began on the evening of January 9, 1944. From the Ilyich cordon, where the ships received troops on the barge, to Cape Tarkhan, only 15 miles, but a storm rose again on Azov, which delayed loading and going to sea. When the landing reached the landing site by dawn, the strength of the storm reached five points. Again, overwhelmed by the waves, the ships sank and crashed, again the sailors and soldiers threw themselves into the surf and with difficulty got ashore under the fire of enemy artillery and air strikes. 1765 people landed on the main direction, on

auxiliary - 374. Again, fighting with the enemy and with the elements, the paratroopers completed the task, having mastered the ridge of heights behind enemy lines. And again - all to no avail. The attack of the army from the front bogged down. Parts of the 11th

The guards rifle corps managed to advance 1-2 km in a day, but they could not connect with the Glavatsky detachment. By the end of the second day, without receiving help and having used up ammunition, the paratroopers, on the orders of Petrov, broke through to the main forces themselves. The corps, without any result, fought against the German defenses until the end of January, during the day of the battle it was possible to advance a maximum of 200-300 meters. Half of the staff officers, including the corps commander, were killed by artillery fire.

Then the triumvirate - Voroshilov, Petrov, Shtemenko - decided, without stopping attacks along the entire front, to transfer the main efforts to the left flank of the army. The main blow was now to be delivered by the 16th Rifle Corps, bypassing the Bulganak fortified area from the south. And of course - the amphibious assault, which was planned to land directly in the Kerch port. The 369th and 393rd Marine Battalions were in the first echelon, and a regiment of the 339th Infantry Division was planned in the second echelon. The set of tasks is standard: to catch on, gain a foothold, distract,

hold out until the main forces arrive.

On the night of January 22-23, the Azov flotilla, it's impossible to imagine on what, successfully landed marines in the city. At the same time, Provalov's divisions went on the attack. This joint operation of the army and navy turned out to be the shortest: the battalions lost each other in a night battle and acted in discord, the regiment of the second echelon did not wait to board the ships, parts of the 16th rifle corps could not break through the defenses, although they massively used heavy flamethrowers.. .

"...despite the perseverance and stubbornness of the Primorsky Army," writes Vasilevsky, "the actions of its troops not only did not give the desired results, but also

led to significant and unjustified losses, and therefore caused concern in the Headquarters. The Supreme Commander-in-Chief, in a telephone conversation with me, repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the leadership of the military operations of the Primorsky Army.

Petrov's people ran out, the regiments were equal in number to the battalions, and the battalions were smaller than a company. On January 28, General Petrov was forced to stop the offensive.

To justify their fiasco, our memoirists came up with a version that, with their active actions and "mass heroism", the Primorsky Army chained seven enemy divisions to itself, and the numbers of units that have never been in the Crimea at all are called. In addition, according to Marshal Eremenko, partisans became so active in the rear of the 17th Army that two divisions of the Romanian mountain rifle corps had to be thrown against them. I wonder who the 51st Army of Kreizer was fighting at that time on Perekop and who surrounded the 19th Tank Corps in the Armenian area, if there were ten enemy divisions in the Crimea?

The optimism of our commanders in assessing their most unsuccessful actions is invariably monotonous: "Despite the lack of territorial successes on the part of the Soviet troops, the enemy suffered huge losses ..."

As the novice poet wrote: "Let the cannon be blown up, it still shoots ..."

In early February, General Petrov made another attempt to break out of the bridgehead into the operational space, but by this time the 73rd Infantry Division had appeared on the Kerch Peninsula.

On February 7, General of the Army A.I. Eremenko. Petrov, with the wording "for self-withdrawal from the conduct of a military operation," was demoted to Colonel General and withdrawn to the Stavka reserve.

In the early days of February, when the battles for the Nikopol bridgehead were being fought, Marshal Vasilevsky presented his ideas on organizing an offensive in the Crimea, considering it possible to launch an offensive on February 18-19. However, the Supreme High Command decided to hold it after the lower course of the Dnieper to Kherson was cleared of the enemy and Tolbukhin's troops were freed for other tasks. February 17 Headquarters in connection with the defeat of the Nikopol grouping of the enemy ordered to launch an offensive in the Crimea no later than 1 March, regardless of the progress of other operations. But due to inclement weather and severe storms on the Sea of Azov, which delayed the regrouping of front troops and their crossing through the Sivash, the operation had to be postponed. On March 16, Stalin ordered it to begin after the capture of the Nikolaev region and the advance of Soviet troops to Odessa.

In the final version, the plan of the operation was to dismember the enemy troops and completely destroy enemy grouping.

The decisive role was assigned to the 4th Ukrainian Front. Main blow

it was planned to inflict from the bridgehead on the southern coast of the Sivash by the forces of the 51st Army (10 rifle divisions, 78th UR, 32nd Guards Tank Brigade) and the 19th Tank Corps. The bridgehead was supplied by two crossings, which were under the constant artillery and air influence of the enemy, the organization of the offensive from here presented great difficulties. Due to frequent storms, the Kreiser army

was regularly cut off from its rear. However, the Germans thought the same way, which means that, subject to all secrecy measures, the factor of surprise should have worked. In addition, a strike from the side of Sivash brought Soviet troops to the rear of all enemy fortifications on Perekop and allowed them to quickly break out into operational space. The capture of Dzhankoy opened up freedom of action towards Simferopol and the Kerch Peninsula. An auxiliary strike was delivered by the 2nd Guards Army of Lieutenant General G.F. Zakharov (8 rifle divisions, 116th UR) on the Perekop isthmus. A separate Primorsky Army (12 infantry divisions, 2 naval brigades, 63rd tank brigade) was to break through the defenses north of Kerch and develop a strike in the direction of Simferopol-Sevastopol, and part of the forces along the southern coast of the Crimean peninsula. In the Kerch direction, the offensive was supposed to begin 2-3 days after the start of the Perekop operation.

The Black Sea Fleet was entrusted with the task of blocking the Crimea, striking at enemy communications, and assisting troops on the coastal flanks. The 1st brigade of torpedo boats from Anapa and the 2nd brigade from Skadovsk were to destroy enemy ships on the near approaches to Sevastopol and directly in ports; a submarine brigade - on the distant approaches and aviation - along the entire length of enemy communications. In total, 12 submarines were allocated for these purposes, and it was ordered to constantly have at least 7, 31 torpedo boats and 430 out of 650 naval aviation aircraft on approaches to enemy ports.

In the course of planning, the idea arose, simultaneously with the offensive of the Separate Primorsky Army, to land operational amphibious assault forces with a force of up to four divisions and two separate battalions of marines on the northern and southern coasts of the Kerch Peninsula. But on mature reflection, having studied the situation at the theater and the state of the fleet, Eremenko abandoned this idea: "Analysis of the experience of landing troops in Feodosia and Kerch in 1941 and 1942. suggested that the success of the operation required the presence of a strong, fast navy, reliable air cover and surprise actions. We didn't have all of that." Therefore, the Azov Flotilla received the task of providing transportation through the Kerch Strait.

The coordination of the actions of all the forces involved in the operation was carried out by the representative of the Headquarters, Marshal Vasilevsky. Marshal Voroshilov remained the Headquarters representative in the Separate Primorsky Army.

The training took place in extremely difficult conditions. The 2nd Guards Army was transferred to the area of the forthcoming hostilities during impassable roads, large forces of artillery and armored forces were concentrated. Through the Sivash, formations and units were transported to the bridgehead along two two-kilometer dams and bridges built by sappers, which could only be maintained in working condition thanks to truly titanic efforts: "Crossing was one of the main goals of aviation and even enemy artillery ... soil for filling the dam. We had to bring lumber from afar. The difficulties were aggravated by the fact that there were no paved roads in the area. Clay soil, saturated with salt, soaked. Mud sucked in any transport ... Circumstances forced the creation of a "car pushing service" that was not provided for by any states and long-term forecasts. The task of this homegrown organization was to rescue vehicles from the mud captivity. By order of the corps for these

targets stood out from the parts of duty tractors and people. On particularly rainy days, the number of fighters of the "push service" reached a thousand people. Only in this way was it possible to bring earth, logs and boards to the crossings, deliver food and fuel, ammunition to the troops, and evacuate the wounded and sick from the bridgehead. The fighters worked, covered from head to toe with salty mud. Having changed from duty, they sometimes could neither wash nor dry themselves. It was exceptionally difficult

transfer to the bridgehead in compliance with careful measures of secrecy and camouflage of the tank corps of Lieutenant General I.D. Vasiliev, carried out from March 13 to 25.

By the beginning of the operation, the Soviet troops included 30 rifle divisions, a tank corps, 2 fortified areas, 2 rifle, 3 tank brigades, 4 separate tank regiments - 470,000 people, 5982 guns and mortars, 559 tanks and self-propelled guns. The density of artillery in the breakthrough areas was increased to 150-160, and at Perekop - up to 200 barrels per kilometer.

The 4th and 8th air armies, which supported the ground forces, had 1250 aircraft.

Blocked in the Crimea, the German 17th Army, commanded by Colonel General Erwin Enecke, had orders to hold the Crimea at all costs, although with the withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Carpathians, Hitler's political motives lost all meaning. In February-March, the army received two infantry divisions deployed by sea and by air, and by the beginning of April 1944 it had five German, seven Romanian divisions, two assault gun brigades, a large number of artillery, engineering, construction, security and police units. . The army consisted of 195,000 men, 3,600 guns and mortars, 215 tanks and assault guns. It was supported by 148 aircraft of the 1st Aviation Corps of General Dikhman, based in the Crimea, and aircraft from airfields in Romania.

The main forces are the 49th mountain rifle corps of General Konrad (50th, 111th and 336th infantry divisions, 279th assault gun brigade), the 3rd Romanian cavalry corps (9th cavalry, 10th and 19th infantry divisions ) - defended in the northern part of the Crimea. Corps headquarters were in Dzhankoy.

The 5th Army Corps of General Almendinger (73rd and 98th Infantry Divisions and the 191st Brigade of Assault Guns), the 6th Cavalry and 3rd Mountain Rifle Division of the Romanians operated on the Kerch Peninsula.

The southern coast of Crimea from Feodosia to Sevastopol was covered by the 1st Romanian mountain rifle corps (1st and 2nd mountain rifle divisions), the western coast - from Sevastopol to Perekop - by two regiments of the 9th Romanian cavalry division.

The headquarters of the 17th army and the 1st mountain rifle corps of the Romanians were in Simferopol.

Three lines of defense were equipped on the Perekop Isthmus to a depth of 35 km: the Turkish Wall, the Ishun positions and the line along the Chatyrlyk River. Although the basis of the German defense was the Soviet positions, equipped in 1941, our command did not have any information about them. It had to be mined bit by bit by all types of intelligence. As the head of artillery of the 2nd Guards Army, General I.S. Strelbitsky: "The camouflage of 12 pillboxes was revealed by artillery fire. These pillboxes are clearly visible. However, the embrasures are not visible, as they were built with the expectation of flanking fire. How much effort and money was spent just to detect these pillboxes! But we could have comprehensive data on all the fortifications, since 8 pillboxes were built by our troops in 1941. The Nazis captured them, corrected them, armed them with their machine guns and now prepared them to fight against us. It seemed that their drawings should be preserved somewhere, the coordinates of the points of standing with a description of the sectors of fire.

However, unfortunately, all attempts to find this important documentation were unsuccessful ... Therefore, we now had to specially open

Hitler's disguise, having spent a lot of howitzer shells on it. The defense directly on the isthmus was held by the 50th Infantry Division of Major General Sixt, reinforced by separate German and Romanian units, with 400 guns and mortars.

In front of the bridgeheads of the Soviet troops on the southern bank of the Sivash, the enemy equipped two or three lanes in narrow inter-lake defile. Four defensive lines were built on the Kerch Peninsula for its entire 70-kilometer depth.

In the operational depth, defense was being prepared at the turn of Saki, (Sarabuz, Karasubazar, Stary Krym, Feodosia.

From the moment of land isolation, maritime communications with Odessa and the ports of Romania acquired vital importance for the German-Romanian group. The intensity of traffic on the Sevastopol-Constanta highway has sharply increased. If in February 20 convoys passed here, then in March - 44, and in April - 141. Their protection was provided by German light forces - 13 torpedo boats, 30 hunters, 17

minesweeper boats, as well as aviation. The Romanian Navy provided four destroyers and three gunboats. In addition to them, about 80 self-propelled landing barges and ferries played a big role, solving a wide range of tasks at the theater. The Germans during this period still dominated the sea, and the reports of Soviet submariners about dozens of sunken ships did not make any impression on them.

Simultaneously with preparations for the defense of the peninsula, the headquarters of the 17th Army also developed an evacuation plan code-named "Ruderbot" (later - "Adler"). Eneke's order, dated March 14, stated: "The balance of forces in the Crimea at the moment is forcing the command to prepare the evacuation of the Crimea by sea and air." The main idea was to withdraw troops to the Sevastopol fortified area within six to seven days using numerous cut-off positions and take them out by sea within three weeks.

The troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front launched an offensive at 10.30 am on April 8. Before that, heavy artillery destroyed a significant part of the enemy's long-term structures in five days. The attack was preceded by almost three hours of artillery preparation, carried out according to a complex and original schedule. First, intense fire was fired for 80 minutes to destroy targets detected by reconnaissance and surveillance, then a powerful five-minute fire strike was made on the front line from one and a half thousand barrels. At the 86th minute, the gunners made a false transfer of fire in depth. When the German infantry got out of the dugouts into the trenches to repel the upcoming attack, and their batteries opened barrage fire, the Soviet artillery again struck the front line, and specially allocated 50 batteries covered the active enemy firing positions. Then the fire was again transferred to the depths, and the infantrymen, shouting "hurrah", raised one and a half thousand stuffed animals in helmets over the trenches, simulating the beginning of the attack. The Germans again jumped out of the dugouts, preparing to repel it, but instead of an attack, they again received hundreds of tons of metal on their heads. Finally, following the moving barrage, rifle chains moved forward.

Despite this, the breakthrough developed slowly. A significant part of the firepower, being well-hidden, came to life. A well-fortified enemy put up fierce resistance. More than half of the Soviet escort tanks and self-propelled guns were blown up in minefields.

In the zone of the 51st Army, the troops of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps, inflicting the main blow, captured only the first and places of the second trench. More successful

acted in a "secondary" direction and therefore received the least means of reinforcement of the 63rd rifle corps of General Koshevoy, knocking out the enemy from all three trenches of the first defensive position.

The results of the first day of the operation made it possible to identify areas of the strongest resistance. Assessing the situation, Tolbukhin instructed to reinforce the 63rd Corps, against which the Romanian 10th Infantry Division, which was less stable than the German troops, acted with the 32nd Guards Tank Brigade, and also to concentrate the main efforts of the 2nd Guards Artillery Breakthrough Division 8 here -th air army.

At the checkpoint of April 9, after an hour-long artillery preparation, the troops of the 51st Army resumed the offensive. Koshevoy's corps, having beaten off counterattacks by the infantry regiment of the 111th division and the 279th brigade of assault guns brought in from the reserve, advanced another 4 to 7 km. As a result of the first two days, success was even more marked in the band of the 63rd Rifle Corps. Here, the front commander ordered to additionally transfer the M-31 rocket artillery brigade, as well as to pull up a rifle division from the army reserve. On April 10, with a strike by five divisions, Koshevoy's troops knocked the enemy out of the inter-lake defile, creating conditions for the entry of the 19th Panzer Corps into the breakthrough.

Intense battles were going on at that time on the Perekop Isthmus. During the first day, the divisions of the 2nd Guards Army broke through the defenses to a depth of 3 km and captured Armenian. To develop success on the night of April 9, the 87th Guards Rifle Division began to be introduced.

By the end of the second day of the operation, the troops of General Zakharov completely broke through the first defensive line. The enemy was forced to begin a retreat to the Yishun positions. The decisive actions of the Kreizer army, as well as the landing of troops behind enemy lines as part of a reinforced rifle battalion - 512 people, 2 guns, 6 mortars, greatly contributed to the success of the offensive of the troops of the 2nd Guards Army.

On the morning of April 11, the 63rd Rifle and 19th Tank Corps went on the offensive. They defeated the main forces of the opposing enemy and began to move quickly towards Dzhankoy.

The successful advance of the 51st Army created favorable conditions for breaking through the Ishun positions, since Kreiser's troops part of their forces went to their deep rear. However, the 2nd Guards Army had to make great efforts to defeat the enemy in these positions. To this end, before dawn on April 12, units of the 87th Guards Rifle Division forded the Karkinit Bay and by 6 o'clock in the morning hit the rear of the enemy 1.5 km southwest of Krasnoperekopsk. At the same time, units of the 126th Infantry Division suddenly forded Lake Staroe and at 6 o'clock in the morning captured Krasnoperekopsk. Other formations of the army attacked from the front.

The breakthrough of the Soviet corps in the direction of Dzhankoy sealed the fate of those enemy units that still held positions on the Chongar Peninsula. The units of the 19th Romanian Infantry Division operating here were forced to start a hasty retreat, which soon turned into a flight.

By the evening of April 11, after a fierce battle, Dzhankoy was taken. With the capture of this city, the enemy defenses in the northern part of the Crimea collapsed completely. The Germans hastily retreated to the "Gneisenau line" in the Simferopol region.

The troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front began to pursue: the 2nd Guards Army - along the western coast to Evpatoria, and the 51st and 19th Tank Corps - in the central part of the peninsula in the general direction of Simferopol.



The withdrawal of Soviet troops to the Dzhankoy region endangered the retreat routes of the enemy's Kerch grouping and thereby created favorable conditions for

offensive of the Separate Primorsky Army. Fearing encirclement, the enemy decided to withdraw troops from the Kerch Peninsula, but failed to ensure secrecy. "Eremenko immediately understood what was happening. Not the scouts informed, but the nervous and often already undisciplined formations themselves. Some Romanian units, units of the German Luftwaffe and the Navy ignored orders to maintain secrecy. Instead of maintaining radio silence, endless negotiations began. The Romanians, as well as the German naval gunners, rushed to "use" their ammunition, which they could not take with them; set fire to the barracks and observation towers, dragged land mines to the airfield in Bagerovo. Staffs and commanders watched this dangerous rampage with fury, but could not cope with it. As a result, the Russians were warned of the retreat before it actually began."

Having discovered preparations for withdrawal, on the night of April 11, Eremenko's army launched a decisive offensive. Its main forces bypassed Kerch from the north, and the 16th Rifle Corps, after heavy street fighting, liberated the city by morning.

1] April, the pursuit of the enemy began in all directions. It seemed that the Germans had nowhere to go, the Red Army dubbed the current situation "fritselovka". The Romanians really preferred to surrender. The Germans were drawn to Sevastopol. The German command sought to cover the withdrawal of troops and the evacuation of military property with the forces of the most stable units. Here again, an interesting pattern is repeated: when Soviet troops cannot break through the enemy defenses, the generals colorfully talk about dozens of enemy tanks that counterattack and are heroically destroyed right near their command posts. But now all the frontiers have been overcome, the enemy is fleeing, and his tanks seem to evaporate, they are not among the scrupulously counted trophies.

The 2nd Guards Army, having completed the breakthrough of the Ishun positions, on the morning of April 12, reached the defensive line along the Chatyrlyk River and overcame it by 12 o'clock. A day later, mobile detachments of the 13th Guards Rifle Corps liberated Evpatoria, Saki, then Ak-Mechet, clearing the western part of the Crimea. Two other corps - the 54th and 55th - continued the pursuit and on April 15 reached the line of the Belbek River, where they met stubborn resistance from the enemy, who had taken up defensive positions on the outskirts of Sevastopol.

The 51st Army, together with the 19th Tank Corps, pursued along the highway and the Dzhankoy-Simferopol-Bakhchisarai railway. The tankers were given two rifle regiments, planted on 120 vehicles. On April 13, they liberated the main city and the most important communications hub of the peninsula - Simferopol. On April 14, the 79th tank brigade broke into Bakhchisaray, and the 202nd tank brigade drove the enemy out of Kacha and joined forces with Zakharov's army. The next day, units of the tank corps reached the Belbek River east of Mekenzia.

On April 12, units of the Separate Primorsky Army broke through the enemy defenses at the Ak-Monai positions, and by nightfall the mobile group of the 16th Rifle Corps reached Feodosia and, bypassing the city from the north, captured it. Finally, Eremenko's army emerged from the narrow neck of the Kerch Peninsula to the steppe expanses of the Crimea. Parts of the 11th Guards and 3rd Mountain Rifle Corps were sent by the commander to Stary Krym, Karasubazar. The 16th Rifle Corps received the task of advancing along the Primorskoye Highway.

On April 13, in the area of Karasubazar, the troops of the Separate Primorsky Army and the 4th Ukrainian Front joined forces. Provalov's corps, moving along the Black Sea coast, liberated Sudak on April 14, and Alushta and Yalta on April 15. However, the enemy's 73rd and 98th infantry divisions managed to slip away.

During defensive battles and a hasty retreat, German losses

amounted to 13,131 people, Romanian - 17,652.

On April 15-16, the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front and the Separate Primorsky Army reached the approaches to Sevastopol, where they were stopped by the organized defense of the enemy on the outer contour of the Sevastopol defensive region. Vasilevsky and Tolbukhin did not lose hope of taking the city on the move and disrupting the evacuation of German troops that had begun. However, the attempts made on April 19 and 23 were thwarted by the stubborn resistance of the enemy, the advance of rifle divisions amounted to 100-150 meters per day; the tank corps, due to the abundance of minefields, could not be brought into battle at all. Despite Stalin's acute dissatisfaction with the delay in the liquidation of the Crimean group, it was necessary to begin thorough preparations for the assault on the heavily fortified line.

#### STORM OF SEVASTOPOL

After the breakthrough of the Soviet troops deep into the Crimean peninsula, the command of the 17th German army and the army group "Southern Ukraine" came to the conclusion that the complete evacuation of troops from the Crimea was inevitable: the combat effectiveness of the German formations had significantly decreased, the Romanian units were on the verge of disbandment. Actually, the evacuation began on April 12. First of all, rear services, transport units, soldiers of the Eastern Legion, prisoners of war and civilians were taken out. By April 20, 67,000 people had been evacuated, an average of 7,000 per day. Formations of the 1st Air Corps were still based inside the fortified area and provided reliable air cover. The Germans characterize the actions of Soviet aviation during this period as "overcautious" and did not cause much damage. "Even more important was the fact that the whole of April and the Soviet Black Sea Fleet failed to deliver a single significant blow to the German convoys. The operations of his submarines were weak, never involving more than five or eight boats at a time, which did not allow success, due to the heroic actions of the German anti-submarine forces. Soviet torpedo boats attacked only at night and did not achieve results. The main forces of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet continued to stand in their hiding places. As a result, the well-equipped port of Sevastopol could be used with maximum load. Everything looked promising."

But Hitler did not agree with the decision of the headquarters of the 17th Army and categorically demanded to hold "the last fortress of the Goths", leaving everyone who is able to fight on the peninsula. He again proceeded primarily from political considerations: "In order to wage war, I first of all need two things - Romanian oil and Turkish chromium. If I surrender Crimea, we will lose both." In addition, the Fuhrer believed that in the event of an evacuation by sea, only scattered formations could be saved, while the released large forces of Soviet troops would be used in a short time in other sectors of the front. Before the troops left in Sevastopol, the task was set: to tie down the enemy forces and inflict as many losses on him as possible. On April 24, the evacuation was stopped. About 6,000 German soldiers and officers were brought from Romania by sea and by air. In place of General Eneke, who did not believe in the possibility of holding Sevastopol, on May 1, the Fuhrer appointed the commander of the 5th Army Corps, General Almendinger. General Conrad

the post of commander of the 49th mountain rifle corps was replaced by General Hartmann, nicknamed Iron Gustav.

For defense, a powerful system of fortifications on the outskirts of the city was used, which consisted of three lanes. The strongest nodes of resistance were the Mekenzievy Mountains, Sugar Loaf and especially Sapun Mountain, which blocked all approaches

to Sevastopol and dominated the surrounding area. In particular, on Sapun Gora there were six lines of trenches covered with anti-personnel and anti-tank barriers in several rows.

The 17th Army included the remnants of five German and three Romanian divisions. According to the headquarters of the 4th Ukrainian Front, it consisted of 72,000 soldiers and officers, about 1,830 guns and mortars, 50 tanks and assault guns, and up to 100 combat aircraft. Only the 49th Corps retained heavy artillery.

All Soviet troops that reached Sevastopol were united under a single command on April 18. A separate Primorsky Army was transformed into the Primorsky Army and included in the 4th Ukrainian Front. Lieutenant General K.S. was appointed its commander. Miller. The front had 253,000 men, 5333 guns and mortars, 106 tanks and self-propelled guns.

In accordance with the plan approved by Marshal Vasilevsky, the main blow was delivered by the left flank of the 51st, the right flank and the center of the Primorsky Army in the Sapun Gora sector, the heights north of Karani. A strike in this area made it possible to use tank troops, since the terrain here was less rugged. The defeat of the enemy on Sapun Gora, for all the difficulty of its assault, immediately gave our troops a decisive advantage: the enemy's defense was losing its stability.

An auxiliary strike was delivered in the zone of the 2nd Guards Army. At the same time, in order to divert the attention of the enemy, this strike was planned to begin two days earlier than the main one. Zakharov's army was supposed to break through the defenses in the area southeast of Belbek and strike in the direction of the Mekenzievy Gory - the eastern shore of the Northern Bay, press the enemy to the sea and destroy him. Then force the Northern Bay and capture the eastern part of Sevastopol.

The 8th Air Army, which had 1,023 aircraft, was given the task of concentrating most of its forces, first in the zone of the 2nd Guards, and then in the zone of the left flank of the 51st and Primorsky armies. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th Guards Bomber Corps and the 50th Bomber Division of the 6th Long-Range Bomber Corps were also involved in strikes against the enemy's defenses. In total they had 567 aircraft.

In the directions of the main strike, the density reached 200-258 guns and mortars per kilometer of the breakthrough area, and in the 2nd Guards Army - 180. (Manstein, preparing for the assault on Sevastopol in June 1942, was proud that he managed to concentrate up to 110 barrels per kilometer breakthrough - "the Germans never achieved such a massive use of artillery.")

During the preparatory period, the Soviet "god of war" methodically destroyed long-term defensive structures, which were already destroyed and the Germans were not restored. Massive strikes were carried out by aviation. As the day of the assault approached, the strength of the fire strikes steadily increased. Over the past six days, preliminary aviation preparations for the offensive have been carried out, during which over 2,000 tons of fragmentation and high-explosive bombs and about 24,000 anti-tank bombs have fallen on the enemy.

The Black Sea Fleet received the task of aviation and warships

block the enemy grouping from the sea, destroy his watercraft in the port, bays and sea crossings. For the purpose of better management, on April 15, the Sevastopol naval base was formed with its temporary stay in Yalta. It included the 1st and 2nd brigades of torpedo boats. The fleet, unlike the army, could not boast of special successes.

It was not in vain that Hitler removed General Eneke from his post: Operation Adler was developing at full speed and was developing successfully. The evacuation was attended by 13 relatively large and 6 small transports, 2 Romanian auxiliary vessels, German self-propelled barges and security forces - a total of about 170 ships and

courts. From April 10 to May 4, 37 convoys took 92,000 military personnel, about 11,000 civilians and 3,800 prisoners of war out of Crimea. Another 21 convoy delivered ammunition, fuel and food to Sevastopol. As a result of 31 attacks by Soviet aircraft, 12 attacks by submarines and 2 attacks by torpedo boats from the convoys, the Ossar tanker, the Leo lighter, 2 tugs and a hunter boat were sunk. Another 3 vehicles and one BDB were damaged. The total losses of the enemy in people amounted to 850 people. During the same 20 days, Soviet naval aviation lost 59 aircraft, and the L-6 submarine did not return to base.

Until the last days, the "express Sevastopol - Constanta" worked smoothly, the Black Sea Fleet did not manage to interrupt the enemy's maritime communications.

At 10 o'clock on May 5, the artillery of the 2nd Guards Army opened fire. For two hours she smashed the enemy defenses. Aviation launched bombing and assault strikes on targets beyond the reach of artillery. At the same time, the 51st and Primorskaya armies in their zones demonstrated the attack by the actions of individual detachments.

At 12 o'clock in the afternoon, Zakharov's troops with five rifle divisions went on the offensive against the 336th Saxon division of General Hageman and by 19 o'clock captured the second trench, advancing up to 1-2 km. The fights were very stubborn. The commander decided from the morning of the next day to bring into battle the second echelons of the corps and develop the offensive. On the morning of May 6, army troops resumed their attack. Encountering organized resistance, by the end of the day they were only able to move up to one kilometer in places.

The offensive of the 2nd Guards Army, despite limited success, riveted the enemy's attention to this sector. General Almendinger believed that the main attack was coming from the north, and transferred part of his forces and a large amount of anti-aircraft artillery here. On May 7, at 10.30, on the Sapun Gora-Karan sector, after an hour and a half of artillery preparation, with the support of the entire aviation of the front, the left-flank formations of the 51st and Primorsky armies began the assault on the Sevastopol fortified area. Bloody battles ensued from the very first minutes. They were especially heavy in the area of Sapun Mountain, which was attacked by six divisions.

However, by evening, the key to the defense of the city was in Soviet hands, all attempts by the Germans to recapture the height were in vain. The corps of the Primorsky Army made almost no progress that day. The Soviet command immediately used favorable opportunities to build up efforts in the Sapun Mountain area. During the night, the 10th Rifle Corps of General G.P. was advanced here. Neverova.

In the zone of the 2nd Guards Army, the 347th Rifle Division managed to move forward, creating favorable conditions for the development of an attack in the direction of the Mekenziev Gory. Therefore, Zakharov instructed on the night of May 8 to transfer part of the forces of the 13th Guards Corps to the right flank of the 55th Rifle Corps.

By 3 o'clock the regrouping was completed, and the forward detachments began

an immediate offensive, and at 7 o'clock the main forces attacked. By the end of the day, the Mekenzievy Gory were taken, and the troops of the 2nd Guards reached the Northern Bay. The northern enemy grouping of the 50th German infantry and 2nd mountain rifle divisions of the Romanians was cut off from their main forces and pressed to the sea.

In the zone of the 51st Army, the enemy was pushed back to the inner contour of Sevastopol.

On that day, the forces of the 11th Guards Rifle Corps also reached the inner contour on the right flank, and on the left flank the 3rd Mountain Rifle Corps and the 16th Rifle Corps advanced from 2 to 6 km, completing the breakthrough of the main line of defense, capturing locality of Karan. Favorable conditions were created for the development of an impact in the direction of Cape Khersones. In this regard, at the direction of the front commander, the 19th Panzer Corps on the night of 9

In May, it was withdrawn to the starting area with the task of entering the battle in the zone of the 3rd Mountain Rifle Corps and developing a strike in the direction of Kamysheva Bay.

Late in the evening of May 8, having received a report from General Scherner that further defense of Sevastopol was impossible, Hitler agreed to retreat to the Chersonese positions and evacuate the 17th Army.

The final stage of the struggle has begun. On the night of May 9, long-range aviation attacked enemy ships and transports in the bays of Severnaya, Kamysheva, Kazachya and Streletskaya, as well as at the airfield at Cape Khersones. Aircraft of the 8th Air Army bombarded and stormed the troops, equipment and centers of resistance at night and in the morning.

The enemy continued to resist stubbornly, no longer with the aim of holding Sevastopol, but in order to ensure a more or less planned evacuation of troops.

On the night of May 9, the 2nd Guards Army, with the help of a rifle regiment from each division, continued the offensive, preventing the northern enemy grouping from coming to its senses or putting its units in order. That night, an airborne detachment was landed in the area of the Northern Spit as part of the rifle battalion of the 387th division, which played an important role in capturing the northern side of Sevastopol.

The exit of Soviet troops to the coast of the Northern Bay throughout its entire length was extremely important. The rear of the enemy group defending in Sevastopol was immediately threatened. The artillery of the 2nd Guards Army fired at direct fire on enemy firepower, manpower and transports in the area of the South Bay, as well as in the Streletskaya Bay.

Under cover of fire, more than 600 guns of Zakharov's division began to cross the Northern Bay. Everything went into action, even coffins: "The Germans prepared a lot of coffins. So let's put them into action ... A minute or two passed, and now on the waves

swayed

coffins with soldiers stuck around them. The water surface of the bay resembled a Bosch canvas: people, coffins and horse corpses mixed up.

"In accordance with the evacuation order, all the horses were shot and thrown into the sea. They stood in line, patiently waiting for their time to come. The bay was filled with thousands of horse corpses. The waves rocked

them up and down... The Romanians found it too long to kill each old friend individually, so they drove the animals to the cliff and fired machine guns. Several hours in a row."

Kreiser's army also continued the offensive on the night of May 9 with specially allocated regiments, and in the morning with the main forces. Formations of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps captured Korabelnaya Sloboda, and the 63rd and 10th Rifle Corps broke into the southwestern part of the city by 15:00.

By the end of May 9, the city of Sevastopol was completely liberated by Soviet troops, and, apparently, the enemy left the city unhindered. Here is what Colonel M.I. Novichikhin, former employee of the intelligence department of the 10th Rifle Corps:

"We entered Sevastopol. And then the Germans carried out such a provocation: they spread disinformation that the war was over. Fraternization began, firing into the air from military and personal weapons. The gunners shot all the ammunition, and those who fired from personal weapons - all the cartridges. SMERSH authorities tried to clarify the situation, but this was not immediately possible.

The troops of the Primorsky Army with the main forces, together with the 19th Tank Corps, introduced into battle on the morning of May 9, developed the offensive in the direction of Cape Khersones, where the remnants of the 17th Army retreated.

On a pre-prepared line that covered Cape Chersonese, the enemy offered desperate resistance. Here he concentrated the most persistent parts of

remnants of the German divisions and all available artillery - about 30,000 officers and soldiers in total. According to German data, there were 50,000 people on the peninsula. The main defensive line was a continuous trench with numerous communication passages. Concrete dugouts were erected, stocks of ammunition, food and water were concentrated. However, the last German airfield was now completely covered by Soviet artillery, and Dikhman's planes were forced to leave the Crimea. Torpedo boats took out personnel at night. The general loading of the army was planned to be carried out on the night of May 10-11, for which more than 190 German and Romanian ships and vessels were allocated. However, the rising storm stopped the convoys that had begun moving to the Crimea, the small-seaworthy vessels had to return, and the evacuation was postponed for a day.

Attempts by the Primorsky Army to break through the line on the move were not successful. For a new assault, the troops of the 51st Army, which liberated Sevastopol, had to be regrouped, in particular, the 10th Rifle Corps. However, the attacks did not stop.

While ground formations were preparing for a breakthrough, Soviet aviation, as well as surface and submarine forces of the fleet, sought to disrupt the evacuation of enemy forces. Aircraft flew to perform missions continuously day and night. On May 10, two miles north of the cape, bombers sank the Totila and Gaia transports that arrived without fighter cover, loading troops from boats and barges.

From the testimonies of the prisoners to the Soviet command, it became known that from 4 am on May 12, the enemy intended to begin a general withdrawal to board ships. Tolbukhin's instructions in this regard boiled down to preventing the evacuation of the enemy by a decisive attack, destroying his troops or capturing them, and sinking enemy ships in bays or at sea.

Evening 11| in May, the German advanced units were ordered to withdraw to the landing points and secure their defense; the evacuation fleet was in the roadstead. In the confusion of the night, many ships did not find the landing points, and many soldiers did not find the ships. By dawn on May 12, about 10,000 people remained on the shore. At 3 o'clock 1000 guns and mortars of the Primorsky Army and the 10th Rifle Corps opened heavy fire

(General Reinhardt, with the remnants of his 98th Infantry Division, which held the center of the position, had already set sail at that time. Most of the soldiers of the 73rd Infantry Division and 2800 people from the 50th Infantry Division were saved. Others were less fortunate). Following this, the troops attacked the undefended "emergency line". The victory report stated that "in a short time the defense was broken", and by 7 o'clock in the morning the entire coast of the bays of Streletskaia, Kruglaya, Kamysheva was occupied by units of the 51st Army. By 10 o'clock in the morning, the Primorsky Army, which included the tank corps, had cleared Cape Khersones from the enemy.

By noon on May 12, the last pockets of resistance were crushed. The enemy, seeing the hopelessness of the situation, began to surrender in large groups. According to the memoirs of survivors: "The Soviet infantrymen accompanying the tanks seemed to be simply furious. They shouted, shot, beat with rifle butts. One German non-commissioned officer refused to give up his Golden Cross. They said: "Good soldier" - and ... mowed down with a burst. The officers were selected and taken away. There were sounds of shots and screams ... The Russians who served with the Germans were built on a rock and shot.

The 17th German Army was defeated. Crimea became Soviet again. At the same time, communist historians cite clearly inflated numbers of irretrievable losses of the enemy: more than 100,000 people, including 61,587 prisoners. It is noteworthy that the authors of the "History of the Second World War", in the creation of which four institutions participated, refer in their assessments to the work of General A.G. Grylev "Dnepr - Carpathians - Crimea", and Grylev, in turn, drew data from messages

Sovinformburo. Thus, the entire Soviet historical science stands on a solid foundation of the fabrications of wartime propagandists. But who can "poison stories" better than sailors? The fleet announced the sinking of 191 enemy ships from April 8 to May 12 (according to later "updated" data - 102), while "only from May 3 to May 13, during the evacuation from the Crimea, the enemy lost about 42,000 soldiers and officers at sea." Who does not believe, try to count. Only the submariners made 16 attacks, and all of them, of course, were "successful."

In fact, during the 12 days of May, the Germans and Romanians carried out 110 convoys. Only in the last 8 days from May 5 to May 12 they suffered quite serious losses in the courts. During this period, Soviet aviation, torpedo boats and submarines sank 6 transports, an auxiliary vessel, 3 self-propelled barges, 2 lighters, a hunter boat and a tugboat. In addition, in Sevastopol itself, as a result of artillery fire and air raids, a tanker, 2 lighters, a tugboat, and 2 boats were killed. Total - 24 units. A number of ships were seriously damaged. A dozen more boats were put out of action as a result of massive air raids on Feodosia and Sudak. Together with the sunken transports, according to various sources, from 3 to 8 thousand people died.

Within a month, the German and Romanian navies removed from the Crimea about 115,000 military personnel, more than 11,000 civilians and 4,260 prisoners. This way got to Germany, in particular, the heroes of Eltigen. Another 21,457 people were taken out by aircraft of the 1st Aviation Corps of the Luftwaffe. Even on the last night, May 12, under heavy artillery fire, the Germans were able to evacuate about 12,000 soldiers from Cape Khersones. Thus, the total losses of the German-Romanian group in the Crimea from April 8 to May 12, 1944 cannot exceed 65,000 people killed and captured, of which about 35,000 were in Sevastopol. All artillery and equipment was abandoned.

Soviet losses during the same period amounted to 17,754 people killed, 67,065 wounded, 171 tanks, 521 guns, 179 aircraft.

Any Soviet source describing the Crimean offensive operation necessarily compares it with the defense of the Crimea by Soviet troops and

will certainly consider it his duty to kick Manstein: "If in 1941-1942. It took 250 days for the Nazi troops to capture Sevastopol, which was heroically defended by Soviet soldiers, then in 1944 the Soviet troops broke into the powerful enemy fortifications in the Crimea in just 35 days and cleared almost the entire peninsula. The assault on the Sevastopol fortified region proper took 8 days, and the liberation of Sevastopol took 58 hours.

At the same time, they somehow forget that the assault on Crimea has begun | November 1943, lasted more than seven months and cost almost 200,000 dead and wounded. Manstein blew only two months longer. True, he, having 10 divisions, destroyed four Soviet armies in nine months, and our commanders boast as a great achievement that they managed to defeat 12 enemy divisions with three armies.

"The victories achieved by the Soviet Army as a result of Stalin's third strike operations radically changed the situation in the south of the country and allowed Soviet troops to launch an offensive in Bessarabia and Romania with the assistance of the Black Sea Fleet. The third strike ended the winter offensive of 1944, as a result of which the Soviet Army entered the front of Narva - Pskov - Velikiye Luki - Mozyr - Kovel - Kolomyia - Orhei - Tiraspol - Odessa, approached the state borders of the Soviet Union and transferred military operations to the territory of Romania " .

After the liberation of Crimea, the troops of the 51st and 2nd Guards armies

were transferred to a new direction - to the Baltic states. But not at once. According to the "smershevets" M.I. Novichikhin: "We had to stay in the Crimea, the reason for this was the evacuation of the Tatars from the peninsula."

## ELEVENTH STALIN IMPACT

What kind of evacuation is this? And this is one of the operations of the eleventh Stalinist strike. A blow to the traitor peoples.

With the outbreak of the war, the Bolsheviks rightly feared the growth of anti-Soviet sentiment in the Caucasus and Central Asia. And they were not mistaken, the Marxist did not let them down  
analysis.

The Muslim peoples never stopped fighting for independence both with the tsarist empire and with the Soviet government. Forced collectivization, religious persecution, the closure and destruction of mosques, the terror of the OGPU-NKVD only added brushwood to the fire. In the 1920s and 1930s, uprisings broke out in many regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia. All of them were mercilessly and brutally suppressed, leaders and active participants were shot, some were deported, some were repressed, some went to the mountains and continued to partisan. The Kalmyks today have not forgotten the atrocities of the Budyonnovsk cavalry in 1930.

With the beginning of the war, the partisan struggle in the Caucasus flared up with renewed vigor. The highlanders sabotaged mobilization measures, deserted en masse from the Red Army, attacked individual detachments and authorities in its rear, met German troops as their liberators, served as their guides, hunted Soviet partisans and enrolled in the "North Caucasian Legion".

So, the bulk of the Balkars willingly cooperated with the Germans. And



"responsible Soviet workers" were in the forefront. So, the Germans appointed a former assistant to the prosecutor of the republic as the minister of Kabardino-Balkaria, and the chairman of the city council of Nalchik became his burgomaster. Similarly, events developed in the Karachaevo-Cherkess Autonomous Region, which was shot three times. In the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in October 1941, a "counter-revolutionary and anti-Soviet" uprising broke out on the territory of the Shatoi region. Although the Germans did not reach Chechnya, they had to keep a large contingent of NKVD troops there to "eliminate the rebels." The Chekists used the same methods as any punitive troops: taking hostages, shooting relatives, special operations to eliminate the instigators, burning villages, sometimes together with the inhabitants.

The "revival of banditry" in the Caucasus was explained by the commissars as "the result of poor organization of party political work", as well as "the private-property psychology of the local population." The Caucasians turned out to be particularly resistant to the "bacilli of Bolshevism".

The Kalmyks actively cooperated with the Germans, who were promised autonomy and recognized as the "Aryan people". The majority of the Crimean Tatars supported the invaders. The Germans opened mosques on the peninsula, provided the Tatars with local self-government. In most Tatar villages there were no garrisons, but volunteer self-defense units were stationed, which fought the Soviet partisans.

In 1944, when the Red Army began to liberate the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, the hour of Stalin's revenge for treason came. In principle, traitors were all those who dared to live and work under the rule of Gauleiters and burgomasters, and not secretaries of regional committees and party organizers. Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachays, Kalmyks turned out to be "traitors" without exception. It is clear that not the entire population collaborated with the Germans, but the most irreconcilable

the enemies of the Soviet government left with the Wehrmacht; many representatives of the Caucasian peoples fought at the front in the ranks of the Red Army. There were no Germans on the territory of Chechnya at all. But Stalin did not spend more time on "party political work", but was going to solve the problem of nationalism and separatism radically. With the formal filing of Beria, it was decided to conduct military operations for the mass resettlement of especially guilty peoples with confiscation of property.

On December 27, 1943, the Kalmyk ASSR was abolished.

"The operation to resettle people of Kalmyk nationality in the eastern regions (Altai, Krasnoyarsk Territory, Amur, Novosibirsk and Omsk regions) was successful. A total of 93,139 people were loaded. There were no incidents during the operation. People's Commissar Beria.

In February 1944, it was the turn of the Chechens and Ingush. The mountainous regions of the Caucasus were flooded with NKVD troops - 100 thousand fighters and several thousand operational workers.

On February 22, on the eve of the Day of the Red Army, the inhabitants were herded to rallies and announced deportation. It was allowed to take no more than 45 kg of cargo per family with you. The inhabitants were driven under escort down to where the cattle cars were waiting for them. Those who tried to run away or hide were shot.

"The operation to evict Chechens and Ingush is proceeding normally. On 25.2, 342,637 people were loaded into trains, on 29.2 - 478,479 people, of which 91,250 Ingush and 387,229 Chechens. The operation took place in an organized manner, without serious cases of resistance and other incidents ... "

An eyewitness recalls: "There were not enough trains. The rest were shot. They covered it with sand, some earth. Yes, they did some shooting. And they, like worms, began to crawl out. They were shot all night." Sonderkommandos are the same everywhere, whatever you call them.

By a decree of March 7, 1944, the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was abolished and the Grozny District was formed as part of the Stavropol Territory.

In March, the Balkars, Gagauz and Karachais followed the Chechens.

"37,103 Balkars were loaded onto trains and sent to the places of a new settlement in the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSR. There were no noteworthy incidents during the operation."

The cleansing of Crimea from "anti-Soviet elements" began in April, as soon as the armies of Eremenko and Tolbukhin broke into the peninsula. To the "evacuation" of the Crimean Tatars, except for

23,000 NKVD fighters decided to involve the troops who stormed Sevastopol at the same time. The organization is described by the same SMERSH officer: "Cars loaded with refugees arrived in the village where we were quartered (among them were Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians and representatives of other nationalities). Each car approached the houses: Tatars were forcibly evicted from them and refugees were moved in. The Tatars were loaded into the same vehicles and sent to the railway stations. The owner of the house in which we lived (a kulak bastard) before leaving went into the barn and killed all the animals with a hunting rifle: horses, cows, sheep, several birds (it is immediately clear that in this village the action was carried out by "non-specialists", the owner had to be shot, as soon as he took out a gun). The trains with the Tatars went deep into the country, then returned empty to the Crimea to evacuate our troops, who had completed the liberation of the Crimea.

The peninsula was also "liberated" from the Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians. In total - from 225,000 local residents. A lot of work was done, 413 fighters of the invisible front, who distinguished themselves most in the fight against "traitors to the motherland", were awarded military orders and medals.

In Alupka, cleared of Tatars, after the war, a monument was erected to the great ace Amet Khan Sultan, twice Hero of the Soviet Union and Crimean Tatar.

By 1949, a quarter of the deportees had died out. The survivors were rehabilitated and allowed to return to their homeland in 1956.

With a bright smile, the eyes are  
illuminated, Stalin was born for the happiness  
of the peoples! An eagle's chest in a  
thunderstorm and a blizzard, Bold and formidable,  
he is terrible to the enemy. He brought us up  
in a happy time, He taught us fearlessness in the struggle.

Small nations have a long memory. We justified everything with high ideals, and then completely forgot, now we again pray for the "bright image" of Joseph Vissarionovich; they, I know for sure, have not forgotten anything.

By mid-1944, significant changes had taken place in the position of the belligerent states and coalitions.

During the winter and spring operations, the Red Army achieved outstanding successes.

The defeats of the Wehrmacht caused a sharp aggravation of contradictions in the countries - allies of Germany. All of them were looking for ways to get out of the war with minimal damage to themselves, tried to establish contacts with the West and Moscow, probing the ground for a truce. In the Pacific, Japan lost one position after another.

The Soviet military industry produced 61,600 artillery pieces, 3,700 mortars, 13,800 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 19,600 combat aircraft in the first half of the year. In 1944, Anglo-American Lend-Lease deliveries reached their maximum. Although the Soviet government tried to talk as little as possible about Western aid, in an official appeal to the army and people, it was forced to admit that "the success of the Red Army was greatly facilitated by our allies, the United States of America and Great Britain, who supplied us with very valuable strategic raw materials and weapons, systematically bombarded German military installations and thus undermined the military power of the latter.

All this made it possible to meet the growing needs of the front.

As of June 1, 1944, the Soviet Armed Forces numbered over 9 million people, 244,000 guns and mortars, over 20,000 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 36,000 combat aircraft. If in terms of the number of personnel the army did not increase much, then its technical equipment has grown 2.5-3 times over the past two years. The organization and training of the Soviet troops, as never before, met the requirements of the war.

The active army had 461 rifle, airborne and cavalry divisions - 6.6 million people, 98,100 guns and mortars, 7,100 tanks and self-propelled guns, 13,500 combat aircraft.

In the reserve of the Stavka there were also directorates of the 4th Ukrainian Front, two combined arms armies, tank and air armies, 9 tank, 7 mechanized, 1 cavalry and 11 aviation corps - 30 rifle and cavalry and 36 aviation divisions, numbering 645 thousand people, 9500 guns and mortars, 1800 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2900 combat aircraft. With such large reserves, Stalin could significantly strengthen the fronts in decisive areas and directions.

The military-political goals of the USSR in the war for the next period were set out in the May Day order of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. They consisted in "clearing all our land from fascist invaders and restoring the state borders of the Soviet Union along the entire line, from the Black Sea to the Barents Sea ... To pursue the wounded German beast on the heels and finish him off in his own lair ... To rescue him from German captivity of our brothers the Poles, Czechoslovaks and other peoples of Western Europe allied with us ... "These goals were the basis for planning the summer offensive.

The final decision to carry out such an offensive was made at the end of April 1944 at a joint meeting of the Politburo and Headquarters. It was necessary to prepare and carry out a series of consecutive and interconnected operations. It was planned to inflict the main blow on the central sector of the Soviet-German front in order to defeat the Army Groups "Center" and "Northern Ukraine", defending in Belarus and in the western regions of Ukraine, then free others

areas of the Soviet Union and transfer hostilities to the territory of Europe.

It was assumed that delivering the main blow in this area would lead not only to the defeat of the two strongest enemy groupings and the breakthrough of the strategic front, but also to the separation and isolation of the enemy troops operating in the northwestern and southern directions.

The Soviet offensive was to begin with the operation of the Leningrad and Karelian fronts on the Karelian Isthmus and in South Karelia in order to withdraw Germany's Finnish ally from the war. Then, without delay, a crushing blow from four fronts in Belorussia was to follow. It was envisaged: at the moment when the German command came to the conclusion that it was here that the main events were taking place, and would move reserves here from the south, launch a decisive offensive of the 1st Ukrainian Front in the Lvov direction. At the same time, it was planned to tie up the troops of Army Group North with the forces of the 2nd Baltic Front. After the defeat of the enemy in these operations, the Headquarters considered it possible to launch active offensive operations in the Balkan direction, in the Baltic states and in the Far North.

On the plans of the Soviet command for the summer of 1944, Stalin wrote to Churchill on June 6: "The summer offensive of the Soviet troops, organized in accordance with the agreement at the Tehran Conference, will begin by mid-June on one of the important sectors of the front. The general offensive of the Soviet troops will be unfolded through the successive introduction of armies into offensive operations. At the end of June - beginning of July, offensive operations will turn into a general offensive of the Soviet troops.

On this day, Operation Overlord began - the Allies finally landed in Normandy. For the operations of the Red Army, this was of great strategic importance. A week after the start of the landing, convinced that the allies had seriously opened the long-debated "second front", Stalin in an interview with the Pravda newspaper stated: "This is undoubtedly a brilliant success of our allies. It must be admitted that the history of wars knows no other such enterprise in terms of breadth of conception, grandiosity of scale and mastery of execution ... Hysterical Hitler, who for two years boasted that he would cross the English Channel, did not even dare to make an attempt to carry out his threat. Only the British and American troops managed to carry out with honor the grandiose plan of forcing the English Channel and the mass landing of amphibious troops.

The Anglo-Americans diverted up to 70 percent of German aviation, almost the entire navy, and in the last year of the war, when Soviet manpower was already severely depleted, up to 40 percent of the Wehrmacht ground forces.

The German command decided that in the summer of 1944 the Western theater should become the main theater of operations. The idea was to throw allied landing forces into the sea in France with strong blows from tank and motorized formations, the inevitability of which was obvious to Hitler. Until then, in the East, it was necessary to hold the positions occupied by the available forces and prevent a breakthrough of the defense.

In the active army there were 285 settlement divisions, including 31 tank and 17 motorized. For the first time, the number of German divisions on the Soviet-German front decreased to 157, while in the West and in the Mediterranean region it increased to 106.

As of June 1, 1944, the strength of the active army was 4,000 soldiers and officers, 124,000 guns and mortars, 10,900 tanks and assault guns, and 5,700 combat aircraft. Of these, 2200 thousand were on the Eastern Front.

Human. The Luftwaffe had a total of 2,364 fighters and 788 night fighters.

The reserve of the High Command of the Ground Forces included as many as 6 divisions, 4 brigades and the command of the 17th Army. These forces included 106,000 soldiers and officers, 1,200 guns and mortars, and 236 tanks and assault guns.

The Reich still had significant economic opportunities. His industry continued to increase military production. The production of new types of weapons was mastered - jet aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles. In June, the first FAAs began to fall on London. German designers invented many amazing, simply revolutionary military gizmos (for example, Eisenhower was convinced that if the Germans had launched cruise missiles six months earlier and attacked British ports, "then the whole operation" Overlord "could have been crossed out" ). The winners copied and studied them for the next decade. But they could no longer save the Reich. Most did not leave the development stage, and those who managed to get to the front were not brought up, few in number and therefore did not provide a turning point in the war with the coalition, which had a huge quantitative superiority in traditional weapons. The German atomic project was closed when it became clear that any results from it should be expected no earlier than 1947. The growth of military production increasingly came into conflict with the shortage of raw materials and labor.

Nevertheless, the German man in the street believed in the Führer's "miracle weapon" until the end of the war. Even in March 1945, Armaments Minister Albert Speer, who knew the true state of affairs, noted with surprise: "They did not doubt victory at all! "The Führer certainly has the last trump card, which he will use at the last moment. In the meantime, he lures the enemy into a trap! Even some ministers, out of their naivety, believed in Hitler's notorious plan: he allegedly deliberately ceded part of the territory to the enemy in order to use a crushing miracle weapon against him at the last moment.

The "last trump card" of the Führer was a capsule with poison.

The assassination attempt on July 20 led to Hitler's final break with his generals: "The deeply rooted distrust of people in general, and of the General Staff and generals, characteristic of his character, has now turned into hatred." The Führer relied more and more on the SS and party organs. The gap between army and SS officers became open after Bormann's order to the Gauleiters "to arrest army officers if there is suspicion, since practically the entire General Staff is in conspiracy with the Moscow Free Germany Committee."

"... the contradictions that destroyed the spirit of soldering and soldier understanding became even more aggravated," writes Müller-Gillebrand. - The assignment of tasks and reports went, often bypassing the commander or commander, through the so-called "service channel of officers of the National Socialist leadership", although this did not officially exist. Surveillance of suspects and dissidents undermined confidence... Denunciations became a frequent occurrence..."

On July 24, 1944, it was legalized that during all official appointments and transfers, especially of generals, the reliability of their views and worldview was checked. In addition, when filling out all personal information, it was necessary to indicate religion, as well as (oh, horror!) Information about the wife.

| On August 1944, a provision on treason against Germany was put into effect for military personnel. (Is it really the article "on treason"? In the fifth year

war! Yes, Hitler was an unprecedented democrat !!!). This provision legitimized the arrests of relatives of a serviceman.

However, Müller-Hillebrand reassures, this provision was directed primarily "against the relatives of the participants in the assassination attempt of July 20 and the relatives of the supporters of the Free Germany Committee who are in Russian captivity." The Fuhrer did not guess to declare traitors to all prisoners of war.

Further, everything was very similar to what happened with us in 1941: "Under the created conditions, they were looking for those responsible for the impending catastrophe, moreover, in such a way that Hitler could not be blamed for it."

Moscow was not upset by the failure of the assassination attempt. Moreover, the elimination of the Fuhrer and the creation in Germany of a new government that could enter into peace negotiations with the anti-Hitler coalition were unprofitable for Stalin. It was much more tempting to go through Europe with a "liberation mission" and "finish off the fascist beast in its lair."

On July 25, 1944, the Fuhrer issued a decree on total mobilization for the needs of the war and demanded that a million new soldiers be commissioned by the end of the year: "... to inspect the entire state apparatus, including the imperial railways, the imperial post office and all public institutions, organizations and enterprises, so that by completely rationalizing the use of personnel and materiel, abolishing and limiting tasks of little importance for the conduct of war, simplifying the organizational structure and the production process, free up the maximum number of people for use in the armed forces and the military industry ... "by the Imperial Commissioner for Total War was appointed Imperial Minister Dr. Goebbels.

And finally, it came to the "militia".

Hitler's decree of September 25, 1944 established the procedure for the formation of a Volkssturm, subordinate to the National Socialist Party: "To form a Volkssturm for the defense of the homeland from men aged 16 to 60 fit for military service." Members of the Volkssturm wore civilian clothes with an armband. The armament consisted of captured rifles, rarely in which units there were machine guns and anti-tank weapons. In some places, the provision of ammunition was five rounds per rifle, in the absence of any organized supply.

The last German men were drafted into the army; the lowering of the draft age from seventeen to sixteen and a half years and the mobilization of former "indispensable" workers from the labor front ensured the recruitment of more than 700 thousand people in August, September and October.

The disintegration of the German ground forces began.

#### FOURTH STALIN IMPACT

"... was inflicted by the troops of the Karelian and Leningrad fronts in June in the region of Karelia. This blow began the victorious summer campaign of 1944. Soviet troops, after careful preparation, operating in difficult natural conditions, on June 10 began an assault on enemy fortified lines and in 11 days completely overcame the long-term defense created by the enemy on the Karelian Isthmus, on the Svir River and in the inter-lake area, to the north

Petrozavodsk.

For almost two decades, relations between the USSR and Finland developed in a complex and contradictory way.

After the October Revolution of 1917, independent states began to appear on the map of the Russian Empire one after another: the Emirate of Bukhara, the Military Government of the Ukrainian Cossacks, the Ukrainian Central Rada, the Kokand Autonomy, the Moldavian People's Republic, the West Ukrainian People's Republic, the Government of the Alan-Orda in Kazakhstan, the Siberian Independent State and others.

On November 13, 1917, the Seimas of Finland was one of the first to declare independence. The Council of People's Commissars, by a resolution of November 18, recognized a fait accompli; for Lenin, this was just a piece of paper. At that time, financed with German money and receiving weapons from the Russian garrisons, the Finnish Red Guard disarmed the squadron units, occupied administrative buildings, train stations, telephone and telegraph stations.

The German authorities, extremely interested in Russia's withdrawal from the war, did everything possible to speed up the process of the "triumphant movement of Soviet power" throughout the territory of the former empire. They supplied the Bolsheviks with material assistance, military specialists and a lot of money that they had to work off. This is evidenced, for example, by a secret letter of instruction from the representative of the German Imperial Bank von Schantz to People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin dated January 8, 1918:

"Today I received a message that 50 million gold rubles have been transferred to the disposal of our agents to be handed over to the representatives of the People's Commissars. This loan was given to the Government of Russia to pay for the maintenance of the Red Guard and agitators in the country. The Imperial Government considers it timely to remind the Council of People's Commissars of the need to strengthen propaganda in Russia, since the attitude of the South of Russia and Siberia, hostile to the existing Power in Russia, is of great concern to the German Government. It is necessary to send experienced people everywhere to establish a uniform

Authorities".

By this time, Lenin and company clearly saw that the majority of the population was hostile to the Bolsheviks: what were the decrees on the press, on the creation of a punitive terrorist organization called the Cheka, and on the nationalization of banks. As a result of the last dashing bandit action, all the money was expropriated from the depositors cleanly. On January 5, 1918, "fighters for the cause of the proletariat" shot down a peaceful demonstration of workers on the streets of Petrograd, and the next morning an anarchist sailor headed by A.G. Zheleznyakov dispersed the Constituent Assembly, which was supposed to elect the legitimate government of democratic Russia.

In order to "establish a uniform Power," the left-wing radicals consciously set a course for a civil war. Vladimir Ilyich also formulated the main terms

success in the fight against their own people - mass terror and bread rations. At the 3rd All-Russian Congress of Soviets held on January 10-18, the same "sailor Zheleznyak" declared that "the Bolsheviks are ready to shoot not only 10,000, but even a million people in order to crush any opposition." Having gutted the "masses" pockets, they began to take away the last. The final step that fanned the fire of fratricide in Russia was the decree on surplus appropriation adopted on May 9, 1918, in which the people's commissar of food was given the right to "apply

armed force in the event of opposition to the taking away of bread or other food products.

Such a coincidence: Simultaneously with the January events in Petrograd, a civil war broke out in Finland. On January 27, the Workers' Executive Committee, the highest authority of the "Red Finns", issued a "Revolutionary Appeal to the Finnish People". The Red Guard began to seize administrative offices and strategic points in the country. The next day, the Social Democrats formed a revolutionary government - the Council of People's Deputies, which abolished the Sejm, the Senate and other old-regime institutions. But very quickly established a revolutionary court. Everything was done according to the rules of Marxist-Leninist science. Already | March Lenin and SNU Deputy Prime Minister Edward Gylling signed in Smolny "Treaty on strengthening friendship and fraternity between the RSFSR and the Finnish Socialist Workers' Republic." Stalin, the best student of Lenin, will perform such a trick more than once. On March 7, at the UP Extraordinary Congress of the RCP (6), the Soviet leader announced that "our revolution ... has spread to Finland."

But most Finns, like Russians, turned out to be normal people, that is, "whites". They did not want to wait for the comrades of the Kuusinen and Sirols to take away all their property and start shooting on a class basis. The example of Russia, where the flywheel of mass murder was spinning, concentration camps were spreading like metastases, and at the same time projects were being discussed for erecting monuments to such "great revolutionaries" as Satan, Cain and Judas, was before my eyes. And the Senate did not want to be abolished, but gave emergency powers to the former general of the tsarist army, Karl Mannerheim, appointing him to command the troops loyal to the government.

Fortunately for Finland, Germany was not interested in the victory of the "Red Finns", and Soviet Russia did not have the opportunity to provide them with "fraternal help" from the outside. According to the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed on March 3, 1918, Russia undertook to recognize Finland as an independent state, withdraw its troops from there and stop all agitation against the government of sovereign Finland. Whom the Germans recognized as the legitimate government became clear when on March 7 Germany signed an agreement with the "White Finns". Therefore, healthy forces in the country won rather quickly. By the beginning of May, despite the fact that, through Comrade Eino Rahja, the Bolsheviks weighed kilograms of diamonds and other valuables for the needs of the Finnish revolution, the entire territory of the former Grand Duchy of Finland was cleared of the Red Guard, and "prominent figures of the communist movement" joined the ranks of the Moscow Comintern nomenclature.

During the period of foreign intervention against Soviet Russia, the Finns could not resist the temptation and tried, within the framework of the concept of creating the "Great Suomi", to seize Eastern Karelia from the former empire (from a formal point of view, it was not at that time the territory of the RSFSR, one of the buffer territories was proclaimed on this territory states, headed by the "Red Finns" - the Karelian Labor Commune), but this idea failed. On October 14, 1920, the Tartu Peace Treaty was signed, according to which the Pechenga region and the western part of the Rybachy Peninsula departed to Finland. The rest was kept

line of the old administrative Russian-Finnish border.

In the 2030s, relations between the two countries continued to be tense. Despite the signing of a non-aggression pact in 1932, which was extended for 10 years two years later, the Finnish government was suspicious of any foreign policy initiative of the Soviet leadership. The Finns, observing the active subversive and terrorist activities of the Cheka-OGPU in neighboring countries, not without reason believed that the ultimate goal of the communists was



internationalists is the return of the former "colonies" and the establishment of a "proletarian dictatorship" in them. The Soviet people, raging in paroxysms of devotion to the cause of Lenin-Stalin at rallies about the exposure of yet another "anti-Party group", were "an alien race, which has a different worldview and other moral values." Therefore, for 15 years, the Finnish government allocated millions of marks for the construction of fortifications on its borders.

Pushed by the military, the Moscow comrades had been hatching plans since the mid-1930s to annex part of the territory on the Karelian Isthmus and the Hanko Peninsula, intending to build defensive lines and a naval base there.

Finally, from August 1939, having agreed with Hitler on the division of Europe, Stalin was able to begin the "territorial and political reorganization" of the agreed sphere of interests of the USSR. First it was finished with Poland. Then, in September-October, "mutual assistance" treaties were imposed on Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. On the basis of their Soviet "friends" sent troops to these countries and deployed military bases in the Baltic states. After that, the Kremlin began to blackmail the Finnish government. At the talks in Moscow, Stalin suggested that the Finns sign the same treaty and make territorial concessions on the Karelian Isthmus. Emphasizing the desire of the Soviet side, which consisted in the fact that "the distance from Leningrad to the border was 70 km," the leader flashed his wit: "We cannot move Leningrad, and therefore the border must move back." In addition, it was proposed to place a Soviet military base on the Hanko Peninsula. The Finnish delegation categorically rejected the Soviet proposals, interspersed with undisguised threats, and on November 13, interrupting negotiations, left Moscow. "Today the soldiers are getting the word," Molotov admonished her. This was followed by a provocation in Mainil.

On November 30, at 8 o'clock in the morning, the troops of the Leningrad Front received an order, without declaring war, "to cross the border and defeat the Finnish troops." It follows from the text of the order that the concern of the Soviet government for the security of Leningrad was a fiction. In fact, "we are going to Finland not as conquerors, but as friends and liberators of the Finnish people from the oppression of the landlords and capitalists." On the same day, the president declared that "Finland and the USSR are now in a state of war."

The day after the outbreak of hostilities, Moscow announced that the Soviet government, through "radio interception, became aware" that in the just liberated Finnish city of Terioki, the "government of the Democratic Republic of Finland" was formed by the "left forces" of Finland, headed by a prominent figure in the communist movement O. Kuusinen. The same "radio" managed to "intercept" the "Appeal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Finland to the working people." This was not difficult to do, since all the "prominent figures" had been sitting on the Kremlin's grub since 1919, and ministerial portfolios were divided at Otto Kuusinen's apartment on Kirovsky Prospekt. On December 3, the whole world learned that the "government of the DFR" announced the conclusion of the "Treaty of Mutual Assistance and Friendship" with the USSR and declared the government of the Republic of Finland in Helsinki invalid.

On December 4, the Helsinki government tried to resolve the conflict through

Swedish envoy Winter. However, Molotov explained to him that the USSR was not waging war with Finland and did not recognize "the so-called" Finnish government "that had already left Helsinki and headed in an unknown direction ...". On December 5, Molotov announced that the Red Army was only providing assistance to the Armed Forces of the DFR, and confirmed the fact of peace with Finland. However, this time too, the "focus failed." Stalin's trick with the creation of a puppet government, calling on a foreign state to occupy its own country, led to

completely opposite results. He consolidated all the forces in Finland to fight "against Bolshevik fascism", although earlier many politicians, including Marshal Mannerheim, were in favor of far-reaching concessions. Now even former soldiers of the Red Guard signed up as volunteers.

The war took on a protracted and bloody character. She showed the amazingly high combat training and stamina of the Finnish army and demonstrated to the whole world the incredibly low combat capability and untrainedness of the Soviet soldiers of the liberators. The latter circumstance was one of the arguments that convinced Hitler to sign the Barbarossa plan. The shameful aggression led to the foreign policy isolation of the Soviet Union, the Western countries took an increasingly hostile position, directly calling the USSR an ally of Hitler. Economic difficulties were mounting inside the country. Therefore, having accomplished the "matter of honor" - breaking through the "Mannerheim Line", the Soviet leadership began to look for ways to conclude peace in this undeclared war.

It was no longer the LenVO that fought with little Finland, but almost half of the entire Red Army. The Finnish army was at the limit of its strength, the situation at the front was critical, all reserves were exhausted. Under pressure from the military, the Sejm agreed to negotiations.

On March 12, 1940, Moscow signed a peace treaty with the "despicable White Finnish government of landowners and capitalists." Kuusinen's "government", which represented no one, went to the dustbin of history. Controversial issues, of course, were settled in favor of the winners. The USSR included the entire Karelian Isthmus, including the city of Vyborg, the Vyborg Bay with islands, the western and northern coasts of Lake Ladoga, the Finnish part of the Rybachy and Sredny peninsulas. Finland leased the Hanko peninsula to the Soviet Union for a period of 30 years, and the USSR withdrew its offer to conclude a mutual assistance pact and undertook to withdraw its troops from the Petsamo region. Thus, Stalin formally received even more than he demanded before the start of the war. However, the Finns defended their independence and retained the armed forces. And the Soviet Union, instead of a neutral state, received a convinced enemy on its border, eager for revenge.

The bitter experience of the Winter War strengthened the conviction of the Finnish government in the hostility of the USSR. The Finns began to look for political support wherever it could be found. Ultimately, it was Soviet aggression and the desire to "get compensation" that pushed Finland into a military alliance with Germany. The occupation and annexation of the independent Baltic republics "to the happy family of Soviet peoples", carried out in the summer of 1940, made a great impression. The Finnish government saw with its own eyes the prepared future. In addition, rumors reached the Finns about the demands regarding Finland made by Molotov during the November visit to Berlin. The Finns feared that the unconditional neutrality they had previously adhered to would only lead to a war against both Germany and the USSR at the same time. It was preferable to choose one of the sides in time. The prospects for friendship with Stalin were quite clear. The Western powers could do nothing to help. From August 1940, a course was taken towards rapprochement and military cooperation with Germany.

At the end of May 1941, Finnish-German

negotiation. As General Ditmar points out: "The decisive prerequisite for conducting operations against Leningrad from the north, as well as the operation to seize the Murmansk railway, was the entry of Finland into the war on the side of Germany. The Soviet Union itself contributed to this. The war started under a trifling pretext in the winter of 1939/40, the harsh conditions of the Muscovite peace with which it ended, and the almost open threats to the very existence of Finland from the Soviet Union caused the Finnish people to feel such despair and anxiety,

that joining a strong Germany, which was then at the zenith of its power, seemed to the Finns the only way out of the situation. However, the Germans did not put pressure on the Finns, and Finland was in no hurry with assurances of allied loyalty. An agreement was reached on the movement of German troops from Norway to the Finnish Arctic, as well as on the joint conduct of hostilities in the event of an attack by the Soviet Union on Finland.

The main goal of the Finns was the return of the lost territories, then everything depended on the course of the war and the desire of the Germans to share what they had acquired with their "brothers in arms".

Despite the military preparations of Finland, which was made aware of the Barbarossa plan, the reason for the start of the war was the Soviet bombing of Finnish cities and airfields, which began on June 25, 1941. Of course, without declaring war. It was the governments of the landlords and capitalists who were obliged to adhere to the norms of international law, and the world's first "republic of workers" did not fight with anyone, but only provided assistance to the "oppressed classes".

The history of the Leningrad Military District proudly reports: "On June 24, the Headquarters of the High Command of the Armed Forces of the USSR informed the Military Councils of the Northern Front, the Northern and Baltic Fleets that German troops and aircraft were concentrating in Finland to attack Leningrad and capture Murmansk and Kandalaksha. To prevent (???) their attack, Soviet aviation, at the direction of the Headquarters, at dawn on June 25, attacked 18 enemy airfields, making 487 sorties. 30 enemy planes were destroyed on the ground and 14 were shot down in air battles. Attacks on enemy airfields continued in the following days.

It is noteworthy that literally three days before Stalin, gentle and fluffy, was terribly afraid of all kinds of provocations. And now he is bombing his neighbor without any complexes, not really knowing anything about the plans to "capture Murmansk and Kandalaksha." He still believes that the Red Army will transfer the fighting to foreign territory with a mighty blow.

On the same evening, at a meeting of parliament, it was announced that the war begins with the same thing as the Winter War - with the attack of the USSR.

On June 26, President Ryti declared war on the Soviet Union. Going on the offensive on July 3, the Finnish army recaptured all the territories that previously belonged to Finland within three months. At the end of September, she went to the Svir, crossed it, seized a bridgehead east of Mlodeynoye Pole, and captured Petrozavodsk. To the north of Lake Onega on December 5, after stubborn fighting, Medvezhyegorsk was taken. As a result, all the northern land communications of Leningrad were cut. Mannerheim refused to take part in the attack on the "cradle of the Russian revolution", storming the fortifications of the 22nd fortified area under the fire of the Kronstadt forts.

On December 6, 1941, Great Britain declared war on Finland. Four days later, the United States of America took the side of the anti-Hitler coalition. The defeat of the Germans at Stalingrad shook the faith of the Finns in the victory of German weapons. "The Finnish government, having lost confidence in success," writes Ditmar, "and therefore preoccupied with the fate of its country, refused to take any action

which could further aggravate relations between Finland and the United States. The fact is that the latter did not completely break off diplomatic relations with Finland, and the Finns saw this as the only way to salvation if Germany's position did not improve during the war. Under such circumstances, a new German-Finnish offensive was associated with a very great political risk for the Finns.

Beginning in 1943, the Finnish government made attempts to establish peaceful contacts with Great Britain and the United States, but failed. Demands to break the alliance with Germany and withdraw from the war sounded more and more insistent in parliament. In November 1943, the leadership of the Social Democratic Party issued a statement emphasizing not only Finland's right to withdraw from the war at a time that it considered convenient, but also noted that this step should be taken without delay. At the same time, the Finnish government, with Swedish mediation, sounded out Moscow's position on the issue of making peace. The main obstacle immediately became the desire of the Finns to keep their own territories occupied during the "war of continuation", that is, the recognition of the 1939 border. However, Stalin firmly stood on the position of recognizing the acquisitions of the Soviet Union, carried out as a result of collusion with Hitler in 1939-1940.

In mid-January 1944, Soviet troops broke into the German defenses near Leningrad and Novgorod and pushed them back into the Baltic. Within a month, the Red Army advanced 150-250 km, cleared the coast of the Gulf of Finland from the enemy to the mouth of the Narva River and the entire territory east of Narva and Lake Peipus. The current situation forced the government of Finland at the end of January to turn again to the government of the USSR in order to find out the conditions under which Finland could stop hostilities and withdraw from the war. A meeting of the Soviet Ambassador A.M. Kollontai with State Councilor Y. Paasikivi, the representative of Finland, during which Kollontai first of all pointed out that only the 1940 border could be the starting point for concluding a truce.

For greater "persuasiveness" throughout February, while unofficial negotiations were going on, Soviet long-range aviation bombed targets in Finland. On February 11 and 23, massive attacks were carried out on the ports of Kotka and Turku. In two nights, 358 aircraft dropped 402 tons of bombs on port facilities and ships. On the night of 7, 17 and 27 February, the ADD carried out three raids on Helsinki. 1980 aircraft dropped 2386 tons of bombs on the city, including super-heavy aircraft land mines FAB-2000 and FAB-5000. The third raid was especially powerful, in which 850 aircraft took part. It lasted 12 hours; strikes were delivered from various directions and were echeloned in time and height.

At the end of March, negotiations took place in Moscow, where the Soviet proposals for peace with Finland were handed over to the Finnish delegation, the main content of which was as follows. Severing relations with Germany and internment or expulsion of German troops during the beginning of April; restoration of the Moscow Treaty of 1940; immediate return of Soviet and allied prisoners; demobilization of half of the Finnish army and its transfer to a peaceful position; damages to the Soviet Union in the amount of \$600 million, paid over five years in commodity deliveries; the return of the USSR to Petsamo and the Petsamo region. The Soviet government, in turn, waived the right to lease the Hanko Peninsula without any compensation.

On April 18, the Soviet terms were officially answered in the negative. The Finnish leadership still hoped that Germany would provide Finland with the necessary military and economic support at a critical moment. It also counted on the political assistance of the US government, which had diplomatic relations with it. There was also direct pressure

Berlin, who believed that the conclusion of a separate peace would be an act of "absolute betrayal", and did everything to prevent Finland from withdrawing from the war. According to Finnish historians, Hitler even continued the blockade of Leningrad to the last in order to force the Finnish troops not to stop fighting with the Red Army. The German envoy to Helsinki spoke directly about the possibility

the occupation of the now unreliable Finland by German troops. However, after the catastrophic defeats in the winter-spring campaign, especially on the southern wing of the Eastern Front, the Fuhrer's threats could no longer be provided with real force.

By mid-1944, Finland was in a state of deep crisis.

The Finnish command set the task for its army to hold its positions at all costs. Using numerous lakes, rivers, swamps, forests, granite rocks and hills, the Finns created a strong, well-equipped defense in terms of engineering. Its depth on the Karelian Isthmus reached 120 km, and in South Karelia - up to 180 km. Particular attention was paid to the construction of long-term fortifications on the Karelian Isthmus.

In South Karelia and on the Karelian Isthmus, the Finns had 14 infantry, 1 tank divisions, 8 infantry and 1 cavalry brigade. They numbered 268,000 men, 1,930 guns and mortars, 110 tanks and assault guns, and 248 aircraft. This grouping actually represented all the forces of the Finnish army, with the exception of one infantry brigade, located in the north. The basis of the armored fleet was captured Soviet tanks T-34 and T-26 and German-made 75-mm assault guns 5040. Finnish fighter pilots flew Dutch Fokkers, French Morans, German Messers, American Brewsters, British Hurricanes, and Soviet Seagulls. Bomber aviation "served" such machines as the "Blenheim" MK 1, 7-88, Oo 17, DB-3 and Pe-2.

Some representatives of the military leadership believed that the Armed Forces of the USSR "would not launch an offensive against Finland", but would concentrate all their efforts on the defeat of Germany.

However, the summer offensive of the Red Army, quite unexpectedly for the enemy, began precisely on the Karelian Isthmus and in South Karelia.

#### VYBORGSK-PETROZAVODSK OPERATION

To defeat the Finnish army, restore the state border in this sector of the front and withdraw Finland from the war, the Headquarters of the Soviet Supreme High Command decided to conduct a major offensive operation. The troops of the Leningrad and Karelian fronts, with the assistance of the Baltic Fleet, the Ladoga and Onega military flotillas, were to defeat the opposing enemy with powerful blows, capture Vyborg, Petrozavodsk and reach the Tiksheozero-Sortavala, Kotka line. The operation was started by the troops of the Leningrad Front, then the Karelian Front went on the offensive. The forces allocated for this numbered 451,500 people, about 10,000 guns and mortars, over 800 tanks and self-propelled artillery installations, and more than 2,200 aircraft.

The Vyborg operation on the Karelian Isthmus was to be carried out by the troops of the right wing of the Leningrad Front under the command of General of the Army L.A. Govorova. Formations of the 23rd and 21st armies were involved in it - 15 rifle divisions, 3 rifle divisions, 2 separate tank brigades, 2 fortified areas. In total, these armies had about 189,000 people, 5,500 guns and mortars, 881 rocket launchers, 628 tanks and self-propelled guns. The coastal flanks provided: from the Gulf of Finland - the Baltic Fleet, from the side

Lake Ladoga - Ladoga military flotilla.

On the isthmus, the 3rd and 4th Finnish army corps, united

June 15 to the task force "Karelian Isthmus". The group included five infantry (2nd, 3rd, 10th, 15th and 18th), the only tank division, one infantry and one cavalry brigades. In total, the Finns had 100,000 people, 960 guns and mortars, 110 tanks and self-propelled guns, and about 200 aircraft.

The first line of defense with a total length of about 80 km was built by the Finns in direct contact with the Soviet troops, was equipped with field fortifications and was built on the principle of strongholds covering all tactically important areas. This line was defended by three infantry divisions and one infantry brigade. The second strip, 76 km long, was located 15-25 km behind the first and was built on an advantageous natural boundary. This strip was the basis of the entire defense of the Karelian Isthmus and was designed for long-term resistance. It had a large number of powerful reinforced concrete structures, granite gouges, and shelters. The average density of reinforced concrete structures per 1 km of the front in the nodes of resistance was 12-14 pillboxes and 18-22 shelters. The third line of defense, about 120 km long, ran along the line of the lakes of the Vuoksa water system, through Summa to Murila. Its peculiarity was that it consisted of the fortifications of the Mannerheim Line, which were partially restored and reinforced with a developed system of field-type structures. In addition to the three defensive lines, the Finns turned Vyborg into a fortified area with the territory adjacent to it, creating two bypasses around it. The coast of the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga were fortified in case of repelling the landings of the Red Army.

Since the impenetrable wooded and swampy terrain on the Karelian Isthmus made it difficult to widely use heavy military equipment, Govorov decided to deliver the main blow with the forces of the 21st Army, Lieutenant General D.N. Gusev in the coastal direction - along the northeastern coast of the Gulf of Finland. This made it possible to widely use naval artillery to break through the enemy defenses and to land troops from the sea to help the troops advancing on Vyborg. 23rd Army Lieutenant General A.I. Cherepanova went on the offensive after the troops of General Gusev reached the line of the Sestra River. It was planned to capture Vyborg on the 9-10th day of the operation. The overwhelming majority of the forces of the front were concentrated on a 12.5 km long breakthrough section.

Three armies of the Leningrad Front, concentrated on the Narva sector, were ordered to intensify their operations and prevent the transfer of German troops from the Baltic to the Karelian Isthmus. In the event that the German command used part of the forces of the 20th mountain army to help the Finns, it was envisaged that the Soviet troops would go on the offensive north of Belomorsk.

Before the start of the operation, the Baltic Fleet was supposed to covertly transfer troops of the 21st Army from the Oranienbaum region to the Karelian Isthmus, consisting of five divisions, and then assist them in developing the offensive with naval artillery fire and aviation, cover the coastal flank, disrupt the supply of reinforcements and the supply of the Finnish army, be ready for tactical landings. Ladoga military flotilla under the command of Rear Admiral V.S. Cherokova received the task of assisting the right flank of the 23rd Army with naval artillery fire and a demonstration of landing.

The actions of the ground units were supported by the 13th Air Army (966 aircraft), two guards air defense fighter regiments and aviation of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet (475 aircraft) and more than 200 long-range aircraft. As a result of the concentration of forces and means on the right wing of the Leningrad Front, Soviet troops outnumbered the enemy in infantry by 2 times, in artillery and tanks by 6, in

aviation 8 times. In the direction of the main attack, the superiority was absolute.

On June 9, the day before the start of the operation, the artillery of the Leningrad Front, together with coastal and naval artillery, destroyed the most durable defensive structures in the enemy's first line of defense for 12 hours. On the 20-kilometer sector of the front in front of the positions of the 21st Army, the density of ground artillery fire reached 200-220 guns and mortars. From the fleet, consolidated into four artillery groups, fire was fired by six batteries of Kronstadt, thirteen batteries of railway artillery, two guns of the Scientific Testing Naval Artillery Range, guns of the battleship "October Revolution" and two cruisers. In total - 174 guns, including 35 guns of 203-406 mm caliber. At the same time, as Major General S.T. Shevchenko, a former employee of the KBF coastal defense headquarters, for the first time in the war, fleet artillery groups "were assigned tasks in the most general form, in contrast to previous operations, when fire plans were developed up to and including batteries. Such planning became possible as a result of the increased culture in the work of headquarters, the improvement of the skill of artillery officers. It took "only" three years of a war of extermination to achieve this.

At the same time, 720 aircraft of the 13th Air Army of General S.D. Rybalchenko and fleet aviation, commanded by General M.I. Samokhin, delivered concentrated bombing strikes and carried out artillery adjustments.  
fire.

Of the 189 planned targets in the main strike zone, 176 enemy defenses were completely destroyed.

On June 10, at 6 o'clock in the morning, artillery and aviation began to prepare for the offensive of the ground forces. It involved 3 destroyers, 4 gunboats, 21 artillery batteries of the Kronstadt region and batteries of the Izhora sector of coastal defense, 15 batteries of the 1st Guards Naval Railway Artillery Brigade. Massive strikes were inflicted on Finnish strongholds in the area of Stary Beloostrov - Lake Svetloe - Rayajoki station, destroying and damaging up to 70% of the field defensive fortifications. Naval and coastal artillery struck at the Raivola-Olila area.

In 3 hours and 15 minutes, six raids were carried out along the main line of defense with alternating methodical fire. As a result, only in a small area near Beloostrov, 130 pillboxes, bunkers, armored caps and other structures were destroyed. Almost all wire fences were demolished, anti-tank obstacles were destroyed, minefields were destroyed, trenches were plowed, and great damage was caused to manpower. Soviet aviation reigned supreme in the air.

As a result, the Finnish defense in the first lane was disorganized, losses in some parts reached 70%. Therefore, when the Soviet infantry and tanks, following the barrage, went on the attack, the enemy could not immediately put up organized resistance. On the very first day, the troops of General Gusev broke through the first line of defense, crossed the Sestra River on the move and advanced 14 km along the Vyborgsky

highway.

Govorov reinforced the 21st Army with the 108th Rifle Corps from the front reserve. The 97th Rifle Corps from the 21st Army was transferred to the 23rd Army, whose troops went on the offensive on June 11. By the end of the day, the 97th and 98th rifle corps of Cherepanov's army were fighting at the Terlolovo-Khireli line. The 21st Army, with the forces of the 30th Guards Corps, captured Khireli, Matilla and fought for Ikola. On the left flank, the 109th Corps occupied Kellomeni, Raivola and Terioki. The first line of defense was overcome on a 40-kilometer front.

In these battles, the 10th Finnish Infantry Division was completely defeated. Its remnants were taken to the rear for replenishment and reorganization. Mannerheim ordered